PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 409

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2002–03

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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 409**

SIXTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2002–2003

House of Commons

Monday 14 July 2003

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Asylum Seekers

1. **Mr. Peter Duncan** (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): How many asylum applications have been processed since 1 January. [125053]

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): In the first quarter of 2003, we received a total of 16,000 asylum applications—a third fewer than in the previous quarter. During the same period, nearly 20,800 initial decisions were made on asylum applications, which is 6 per cent. more than in the previous quarter, and 24,600 appeals were decided—24 per cent. more than in the last quarter of 2002.

Mr. Duncan: I thank the Minister for that reply. She will be aware that asylum applications made at Stranraer and Cairnryan in my constituency have spiralled tenfold in the last two years, yet there are still no permanent Home Office staff in place, in port, to deal with those applications from vulnerable asylum seekers who need help. Will she commit herself to looking once more at the opportunity provided by the combination of Stena Line and P&O in one port facility to put in place the infrastructure so that these asylum seekers are dealt with quickly and timeously and their applications progressed much more quickly than at present?

Beverley Hughes: I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's concerns, but I can tell him that it would not be an effective use of resources to have a permanent, fixed immigration post in small ports such as that to which he refers, which deal only with a common travel area. What is more effective is what we are doing: working jointly with the local police service and the Association of Chief Police Officers to have an intelligence-led approach.

The hon. Gentleman said that asylum applications have spiralled. Since January to March this year, four asylum applications have come through that port, which is a result of the measures that the Government have taken more generally to reduce asylum applications, not only in-country but at designated ports of entry throughout the UK.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Will my hon. Friend help me? I am truly bewildered about why the thousands of applicants for refugee or asylum status still awaiting a determination—after years not months—cannot be employed. It is a fact that all those people are working in what is known as the black economy. It would be much better if they were given conditional opportunities to work and pay tax rather than being a burden on the state and/or being under enormous financial pressure with their families. Why cannot they work while they are here?

Beverley Hughes: As I think my hon. Friend knows, those people who made a claim before July last year, when we changed the rules on employment, can work. It is those who have claimed since July 2002 who cannot work unless their claim takes longer than six months.

That is because it is clear, in terms of the number of unfounded applications that we have been getting, that many people are coming here and claiming asylum when what they really want to do is work. That is a significant pull factor. That is why we have taken away the right to work for new applicants.

Mr. Speaker: Simon Hughes.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I had not asked to come in on this question.

Mr. Speaker: I thought that I had Mr. Hughes down on the list. Perhaps I will get him some other time.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): It is not often that we see a tongue-tied Liberal. Is the Minister still committed to the Prime Minister's pledge to look at our international obligations under the treaties that we have signed on asylum or is she committed to more qualified majority voting on asylum and immigration matters? Surely she cannot have both.

Beverley Hughes: We have been round this course several times previously with the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends. What we have said on the treaties is clear: if that were to be necessary, we would do it. We do not think that it will be necessary, however, and we have made other proposals, which, on a multilateral basis, with other European countries, we think will be more effective. As for QMV, we have also made it clear that when it is in our interests to support that, we will do so, and asylum and immigration are matters on which it can help us achieve a better common policy across Europe, which is in our interests.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): Is my hon. Friend aware that when the Home Affairs Committee visited the port of Dover last month we were hard-pressed to find a single asylum seeker to whom to speak? To what degree have asylum applications fallen in Dover and other Kent ports? To what does she attribute that dramatic reduction? Will she lend a word of praise to hard-working immigration officers on this side of the channel and in Calais who are helping to keep the numbers down?

Beverley Hughes: I will write to my hon. Friend with the exact figures for Dover. As I said earlier, right across the board, in relation to both in-country claims and those at designated ports of entry, comparing the figures for March with last October, we have seen a 50 per cent. reduction in asylum claims. In respect of Dover, he is right that that is in no small measure due to the hard work of immigration officials on both sides of the channel. Indeed, from January to March this year, almost 1,400 people have been stopped from coming to the UK as a result of the detection equipment in Calais. I might say that we are trying to build on those measures by bringing forward powers to enable police and immigration officers to exercise immigration control on French soil. It is astonishing that when that was debated in Committee a fortnight ago, Conservative Members divided the Committee and voted against a practical measure that will succeed in bringing the figures down even more.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): While the rapid processing of asylum claims is much to be welcomed, so too would we welcome the speedy removal of people whose applications for asylum have failed. It is estimated that since the Government came to power, some 250,000 failed asylum seekers who should have been removed have, in fact, remained here illegally. Will the Minister confirm that the Government actually intend to remove those failed asylum seekers? Does she believe that they will ever do that and, if so, when?

Beverley Hughes: I welcome the hon. Gentleman back to the Front Bench—it is a pleasure to see him there. As he well knows, while reducing the number of claims is an important priority, removing people who have come to the end of the road is equally important. The number of people we are removing is rising month on month. In March, 1,500 people were removed, which was an all-time high. Our policy of firm contact management—of retaining contact with people throughout the process, requiring them to report weekly and issuing asylum seekers with cards on which their fingerprints are marked—is part of our strategy to ensure that we remove more and more people. As he well knows, our figures are already much higher than those achieved by the Conservative Government in 1996, when 5,000 people were removed.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): Does my hon. Friend accept that although speedy decision making for fresh asylum seekers is welcome, many people have been in the country for several years on whom no decision, let alone an initial decision, has yet been taken? What steps will she take to speed up those people's applications?

Beverley Hughes: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. He will know that there was an all-time high backlog of 120,000 applications several years ago. That figure has been reduced to 35,000, which is not much higher than the figure for work in progress, but it needs to be reduced further. Of course, as we reduce the number of claims every month, we are investing more resources to remove the backlog. I expect that the backlog will be no more than a reasonable number of cases representing work in progress by the end of the year.

Prisoner Repatriation Agreements

2. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): If he will list the bilateral agreements the UK has for repatriation of prisoners before their full sentence has been served. [125055]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Caroline Flint): The United Kingdom has bilateral prisoner transfer agreements with eight countries and territories. A further six agreements have been reached but are not yet in force.

In addition to these bilateral agreements, the United Kingdom is a signatory to two multi-party agreements covering 77 other countries and territories.

Mr. Turner: I thank the Minister for her reply. Is she aware that 10 per cent. of the prison population are foreign citizens and that a quarter of those—something like 1,700 people—are from Jamaica alone? Would it not be sensible to pay the Jamaican Government to look after those prisoners where they could be near their families, or even for us to set up a prison in Jamaica for them?

Caroline Flint: I know that the hon. Gentleman takes great interest in the matter, and that he secured an Adjournment debate on 1 July on it and other issues relating to the prison population on the Isle of Wight. The Government are keen to conclude as many prison transfer agreements as possible and 10 such agreements have been signed in the past 18 months. I am sure that he is aware that we have constantly asked the Jamaican authorities to enter into repatriation agreements but that they have decided against concluding such agreements with us and other countries. We are mindful of the situation and we keep all aspects of it under review and discussion, but Jamaica does not have the capacity to receive prisoners back at the moment.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Is there a bilateral agreement between the United Kingdom and the United States for the repatriation of British prisoners sentenced in the United States? If any current British prisoners under US jurisdiction were to be sentenced, would either current extradition arrangements or the new draft extradition treaty allow them to be brought back here at the request of the British Government?

Caroline Flint: There is no formal agreement, but we would not rule out repatriation. We have a good relationship with the United States Government and keep all issues under review. There has been a long-standing partnership between us and the US. We listen mindfully to each side of the argument in relation both to people from the US who have committed offences in this country and to those from this country who have committed offences in America.

Police

3. **Rob Marris** (Wolverhampton, South-West): If he will make a statement on the change in the number of police officers since 1997. [125056]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I set a target for increased police numbers of 130,000 by March this year. We had exceeded that target by 1,500 by last September. I had an additional target of 132,500 by March 2004. As of December last year—I am announcing these figures for the first time—we had 132,268 police officers in England and Wales, which is 5,110 more than when we took office in 1997. Hon. Members can see that we are well on the way to massively exceeding the 2004 target. In addition, we have almost 1,500 community support officers, all of whom are available and visible on the beat, reassuring the public that the police are there doing their job.

Rob Marris: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. The increase in police numbers is having a real effect in the west midlands, but of course there is still much more to do. Will he say more about the efficiencies that the police could manage? He mentions community support officers, who are welcome to release front-line police officers to do front-line work. Will he say something about lessening the amount of paperwork that police officers have to do when they arrest someone, for example? The time that it takes to process such applications removes them from front-line duties. Could other police staff do that work?

Mr. Blunkett: We are encouraging all chief constables to consider how both civilianisation and specialisation can help to free officers to be visible and available. There have been some interesting experiments in the west midlands with the better use of forensic science, which has reduced burglaries by 20 per cent. through the apprehension of repeat offenders. I commend what has been done there. I just wish that other forces could match it.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): The Home Secretary seeks to reassure us by explaining how many additional policemen and women there now are up and down the country. The reality, as evidenced in the report in *The Sunday Times*, is that burglaries, robberies and assaults have risen by more than 25 per cent. in rural areas. Is he convinced that he is putting enough resources into rural police forces? Equally, is he not worried that he is squeezing urban crime into rural areas? Does he consider it good politics or good sense to criminalise tens of thousands of people who pursue hunting as a sport when the police are already overstretched?

Mr. Blunkett: I am not entering into the hunting debate. I merely refer the hon. Gentleman to the words of the shadow Home Secretary not much more than a week ago when he advocated, as has his leader, that we divert resources into the high-crime, high-drug areas. I suggest that his Back Benchers have a little chat about how he can do that without pulling those resources out of rural areas. When we decided to keep the specific rural fund and to have a floor below which no one would fall in terms of year-on-year increases, we were mindful of our obligation to serve the nation as a whole, not just a particular sector interest.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): The public inquiry into Harold Shipman's murders found today that the police mishandled the investigation into the affair and that, if they had not done so, three of his murders could have been avoided. Will my right hon. Friend join me in expressing our deepest sympathy to the families involved? Will he push Greater Manchester police to act on the inquiry's findings? Will he heed Dame Janet Smith's call for a radical overhaul of the coroners service?

Mr. Blunkett: I join my hon. Friend in sending a message from this House of deep regret and sorrow to

the families of those who died at the hands of Shipman. The report produced by Tom Luce, which was published at the beginning of June and on which we are consulting, and Dame Janet's continuing work, including the report published today, will form the basis of radical improvement and change in the coroners service. I also want to pick up the point that was reinforced by the new chief constable of Greater Manchester. We must have not simply a better coroners service but a better process and approach from all those who deal with suspicious cases. Had that been the case at the time of the murders, at least three people would still be alive.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): It is unacceptable for the Home Secretary to say that he will not enter the hunting debate when he—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must be seated; his question is not allowed.

Unauthorised Camping

4. **Mr. Colin Pickthall** (West Lancashire): What measures he proposes to assist *(a)* the police and *(b)* local authorities in preventing large-scale unauthorised camping. [125057]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Fiona Mactaggart): The Government have tabled amendments to the Anti-social Behaviour Bill to extend police powers to take prompt and firm action against unauthorised encampments, irrespective of their size, where space has been provided in local authority area[illegible]

Mr. Pickthall: Like many other towns, Skelmersdale is regularly plagued by large numbers of travellers who turn up in as many as 200 caravans at a time to occupy playing fields, factory car parks or any open space that they can find. It costs the local authority vast amounts of money in cleaning up the disgusting mess after they have left and in investing in miles of security fencing. Does my hon. Friend agree that the police have adequate powers but, owing to the scale of the problem, cannot use them properly, and that the guidelines for local authorities have built-in delays that make them inoperable? Does what she has announced cover the fact that there is at last a joint initiative between the Home Office and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to draw up an effective policy to deal with the issue and to relieve the people of Skelmersdale, including me, from this awful problem?

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments on an issue on which he has been active for many years. I read the Adjournment debate that he initiated at about this time of year in 1999 on precisely this problem, so I can see it has been a chronic problem in Skelmersdale. I share his optimism about the capacity of the new guidance and better co-operation between the Home Office and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. We have powers, but it is a question of using them. The guidance that is out for consultation will help local authorities and the police to work better together to deal with the problem of large-scale unauthorised camping that he has highlighted. The final part of that guidance specifically focuses on that issue, which I know is a very serious problem in many areas.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The Minister will be aware that, although the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), was helpful in Committee on the Anti-social Behaviour Bill, he said that the Government were prepared to consider further a problem that affects my constituency that is similar to that raised by the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall). A group of travellers succeeded in purchasing land on a flood plain, on which they improperly dumped thousands of tonnes of hardcore. Owing to delays in the law, it is difficult to do anything about that. The Under-Secretary promised that the Government would look into that variant of this massive problem. Will the Minister undertake to work with other Departments and to meet me to discuss constructive ways of extending the Government's efforts?

Fiona Mactaggart: One member of the ministerial team will certainly be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman. I share his optimism about the commitments in Committee of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. There are already substantial powers on dumping. In preparation for answering this question, I asked for some information about the number of prosecutions on dumping. It seems that local forces are often not as dynamic as they could be in using powers to prosecute when dumping has occurred.

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South): Northamptonshire's geographical position means that it has acute problems at times with illegal encampments. The problem is not so much that there is not enough guidance, but that often the guidance is misinterpreted by local authorities and the police force. At times there is a lack of co-ordination between local authorities and police forces in deciding who should first take action. Will my hon. Friend ensure that when she gives advice to local authorities and the police force, she does not just tell them what can be done or what they could do, but what they should do, and who is responsible for taking the first action?

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful question. His message of better co-operation and collaboration is a key one. It is one reason why the guidance consultation paper is a joint paper involving the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Home Office. We are working together to ensure that that collaboration at national level is reflected at local level. We are seeking to provide guidance that leads to a robust approach—a phrase that is used in the draft guidance—that can be reflected on the ground.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): Does the Minister recognise that one of the principal problems that leads to large-scale encampments not being dealt with is that the police cannot deal with the numbers involved and ensure public safety? That has certainly been the case in Worcestershire. I would be grateful if she commented on that. If the Home Secretary will not recognise that problem, does the hon. Lady at least understand that

her Government's determination to go ahead with a Bill to ban fox hunting will only add to the problem of public order and public safety?

Fiona Mactaggart: The efforts of the Conservative party to defend the rights of fox hunters under any guise are becoming almost entertaining. However, the hon. Lady makes a serious point about mass gatherings and the need for intelligence where mass gatherings are planned. I hope that the fox hunting community, which has put a great deal of effort into persuading us all that it is a law-abiding community, does not intend to break the law and organise in a way that means that people are not aware of any gatherings that it might be planning.

In the joint guidance on which we are consulting, the final section is about the mass gatherings, and especially those that have expensive security and clean-up implications. We are seeking guidance about best practice and examples of best practice from those with direct experience so that we can assist people in dealing with some of the practical difficulties that they face.

Youth Offending

5. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): What action the Government are taking to tackle youth offending. [125058]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): We have put in place a broad programme to prevent children from being drawn into crime, with targeted initiatives focusing on those young people most at risk in high-crime areas. We have also made significant improvements to the youth justice system that have assisted in reducing reoffending rates.

Hugh Bayley: Does my hon. Friend recognise the sense of powerlessness that a community can feel when a group of children or young people—sometimes a very small group—run riot and engage in a localised epidemic of vandalism or criminal damage? What help can the Government give those communities so that they can believe that their voice and views will be listened to by law enforcement authorities and the courts? What are the Government doing to encourage local authorities to provide meaningful activities for young people in deprived neighbourhoods over the summer holiday to try to divert them from antisocial behaviour?

Paul Goggins: My hon. Friend is right that many local communities feel overrun and powerless in that way, which is why the Government are taking action in the Anti-social Behaviour Bill and a range of other measures. He is right to argue that communities need to be more involved in the criminal justice system—an issue that was raised by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in the Edith Kahn lecture. To give my hon. Friend an example of the use of referral orders—the main court disposal for first-time young offenders—young offenders are referred to a local panel, on which sit two local community members, and which determines the programme that they must follow. In York since last April, my hon. Friend will be pleased to know that there have been 108 referral orders, and there are now 28 community panel members in service.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): We are united across the House in our desire to lift young people off the conveyor belt to crime and see what the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) described as worthwhile activities for young people. Presumably, we also all agree that, in our desire to lift some young people off the conveyor belt to crime, we must not create incentives for other young people to get into crime. May I therefore take it that the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety was either inaccurately reported or was making an elaborate joke when it was suggested in the weekend papers that she wanted to pay young recidivists up to £20,000 a year to go straight?

Paul Goggins: I read the press reports over the weekend. They were right in one respect—my hon. Friend the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety thinks highly of that project. However, we need to clarify some of the detail in those reports. First, people are not employed in that project as an alternative to prison—they are paid to work as mentors for young people, and the starting salary is about £8,000. If they gain all the qualifications, they can earn up to £15,000, but all of them are full-time staff. Some of them are ex-offenders, but they are turning that negative experience into something positive for society. I would have thought that, now that he knows that, the right hon. Gentleman would join me in supporting such an approach.

Mr. Letwin: I am glad to hear that. As we seem to be making progress, will the Minister help us by agreeing also that the probation service ought to play an important part in helping young people off the conveyor belt to crime? If so, what does he make of a letter from the head of service delivery for the probation service in the London boroughs of Merton and Sutton, who writes to the clerk to the justices in a magistrates court:

"You will be only too aware of the . . . difficulties that the London Probation Area has been experiencing . . . This is not a problem that is confined to Merton and Sutton Boroughs but is . . . occurring throughout the country . . . In order to remedy the situation it has been agreed by the London Probation Area that we will suspend individual supervision on all but very high risk offenders".

Instead of ruminating about further schemes, should not the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety attend to the crisis in the probation service?

Paul Goggins: I am aware of some of the difficulties currently experienced in London, and I am looking at them closely with senior management in the probation service. However, I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that there are now 2,000 more probation officers than there were in 1997 and that the overall budget for the probation service is set to double in the current spending period. The Government are therefore putting resources into the probation service, and we intend to make sure that the kind of service that it offers is a credible alternative to custody.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): What assessment has my hon. Friend made of the effectiveness of youth

offending teams, given that they have now been in place for some time? Is the mix of different professionals, such as education and health professionals, having the desired effect in dealing with young offenders' educational, drug and other problems and reducing the likelihood of their reoffending?

Paul Goggins: My hon. Friend is right. The way that services are coming together at local level is very encouraging, and can provide the right package of support for young people. It can provide the strong support that can deter them from reoffending. To give an example of such programmes, the youth inclusion programme pinpoints young teenagers who are most at risk in the big high-crime areas. There has been a 30 per cent. reduction in the number of arrests in those areas as a result of that programme, so co-ordinated action between all the agencies can make a difference.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): If the Government are anxious to cut down the number of young offenders, why are they taking steps to make every member of every pony club in the country a potential young offender?

Paul Goggins: I will look carefully at the issue raised by the hon. Gentleman, but given the range of my responsibilities, including prisons and probation, and the challenges that we face in those areas, I hope he will forgive me if I pass on that one.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I congratulate the Front-Bench team on measures such as the Youth Justice Board at national level and the youth offending teams at local level, which are having a real impact. Will my hon. Friend comment on what my local police say—that much petty youth offending is alcohol-fuelled? Will he have a conversation with our hon. Friend the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing, and Community Safety, who I am pleased to say has brought with her from the Department of Health the alcohol strategy that she was developing?

Paul Goggins: My hon. and learned Friend is right. Alcohol is far too often involved in offending, not least among young people. We need to deal head-on with that problem and provide alternative positive activities for young people that will take them away from crime. Where that happens, we see very good results.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

6. **Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): If he will change the burden of proof for anti-social behaviour orders from criminal to civil. [125059]

The Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing, and Community Safety (Ms Hazel Blears): We have no plans to do so. The standard of proof set by the House of Lords, in the case of R *v* Crown Court at Manchester ex parte McCann and Others, has not proved to affect antisocial behaviour order applications adversely. ASBOs are one tool in the fight against antisocial behaviour. The measures in the Anti-social Behaviour Bill will give further powers to police and local authorities to tackle local disorder.

Mr. Allen: In common, I suspect, with most Members, the majority of cases that I dealt with at my surgery at the weekend involved antisocial behaviour. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his predecessor on introducing measures to tackle antisocial behaviour that will help the majority of the constituents who came to my surgery on Saturday. But will my hon. Friend the Minister keep antisocial behaviour orders under review at all times? They were a good idea when they first came in, and they have been improved. Can we ensure that we continue to improve them so that they can be more and more workable? I look forward to the debate on Wednesday about making sure that the proof required for an ASBO is not at criminal but at civil level.

Ms Blears: Indeed, I look forward to discussing the issue at length with my hon. Friend in Westminster Hall later in the week. I can confirm to him that the orders are civil orders, and that the civil standard of evidence is therefore admissible. Antisocial behaviour orders are being granted at an increasing pace. There were 1,112 orders up to March this year, and only 31 have ever been refused. The police and local authorities are increasingly using the powers that the Government have given them to tackle antisocial behaviour and disorderly conduct.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I have had at least two cases of antisocial behaviour recently. In one case, a person driving without insurance or a licence hit another car and gave a number, but the police will not follow up in cases where the person is found not to have insurance because they say they cannot act upon suspicion—they must have third-party evidence. That is causing a great loss of faith in our policing and legal system. Will the Minister look at those cases? They could well be answered by accepting the case advanced by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) and transferring the burden of proof to civil, rather than criminal, standard.

Ms Blears: I will gladly look into the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises. Members of the public have a natural concern when powers are provided but not used in the way they ought to be. People have particular concerns about the breaches of antisocial behaviour orders. We are determined to ensure that where powers are available, they are used to their fullest extent.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): With regard to antisocial behaviour, is there not also a responsibility on corporate interests? Is my hon. Friend as disappointed as I was when I attended a meeting last Friday in my constituency to learn that despite lobbying for many years by local councillors, including councillor Gregory Owens, BT has failed to do anything about a problem exchange building that is attracting antisocial behaviour on the part of local youth? Is there anything the Home Office can do to get corporate interests to accept their responsibilities as good neighbours?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. He will know that we have tabled

amendments to the Anti-social Behaviour Bill to try to ensure that public utilities take responsibility for the graffiti and fly posting that often affect their buildings and equipment. It is important that businesses are at the heart of the community. They are as much members of the community as anybody else. We want to ensure that businesses not only take their fair share of responsibility, but benefit from the reduction in antisocial behaviour that this Government are determined to achieve. There are rights and responsibilities for business, as for all of us, in this field, and I am delighted that we are working much more with business on a range of such issues.

Domestic Violence

7. **Judy Mallaber** (Amber Valley): What plans he has for programmes to change the behaviour of domestic violence offenders. [125060]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): On 18 June, I published a comprehensive proposal for preventing domestic violence, protecting victims and providing support to those who have been abused and affected. That includes ways of changing attitudes so that those who believe that domestic violence is acceptable get the message very clearly. Two national programmes have been piloted and we have accredited them, and a further programme is under development, as my hon. Friend knows. I should like to commend her for the work that she has done locally and nationally in pursuing this issue.

Judy Mallaber: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Although difficult, it is vital that we address the behaviour of domestic violence offenders, as the evidence suggests that they will almost certainly continue to assault their current and future partners. As part of the programme, will my right hon. Friend ensure that accreditation and therefore funding for Probation Service programmes is rolled out as soon as possible? Will he also consider the experience in respect of other programmes such as PODA—Prevention of Domestic Abuse—in Derby, which works with perpetrators who voluntarily seek help, but is struggling to maintain its funding after initially having three years of lottery funding? Will he consider how such schemes can be extended?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall certainly consider that issue, as the first important step forward is when someone acknowledges that they have a problem and are in need of help. There is a real problem—it applies not only to this area—where pilot funding comes to an end without what might be described as an exit programme to ensure that funding can be picked up and that the programme will not be disadvantaged. These are very important issues. We do not want to proceed with something when we do not know that it works, but when it works we need to ensure that there is long-term funding to sustain it.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is a compelling case for seeking to emulate the example of Sunderland city council's housing department, which includes in tenancy agreements a clause that allows for the removal of a convicted domestic violence offender and his placement in a shelter or refuge where he gets therapy and thereby the chance of rehabilitation?

Mr. Blunkett: I am not in full possession of every detail of the Sunderland scheme. The hon. Gentleman will recall that, in my statement on 18 June, I made a point of saying that it was important to get the perpetrator out of the house, leaving the family and children with stability wherever that is possible, and as long as we can ensure with restraining orders that they are not terrorised by the individual repeatedly going back to the home.

Vera Baird (Redcar): May I raise an issue about the standard of proof, which has just been discussed in respect of anti-social behaviour orders, in domestic violence cases? Like ASBOs, such cases involve civil proceedings, but where a domestic violence allegation is raised, its quasi-criminal nature means that the judge adopts the higher criminal standard of proof to such an extent that women are often advised not to pursue such allegations. Is it not very important that the overlap between civil and criminal cases and their respective standards of proof should play a major role in the current domestic violence review?

Mr. Blunkett: I believe my hon. and learned Friend is correct. We indicated that liaison and work between the civil and criminal courts was crucial. We have the experiments in Cardiff, West Yorkshire and London, and we need to extend them, as we were describing this time last week, as part of bringing justice to the community through community justice courts, so that we can ensure that, on a range of issues, including this one, the courts, the magistracy and the judiciary are as close to the people as possible, and that they understand the difficulties and have the power to act.

Community Support Officers

8. **Dr. Nick Palmer** (Broxtowe): What assessment he has made of the impact of community support officers on the incidence of antisocial behaviour. [125061]

The Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing, and Community Safety (Ms Hazel Blears): We have received very positive accounts from a variety of sources of the good work that is being done by community support officers in the communities where they are already on patrol. I have not yet made any assessment of their impact on the incidence of antisocial behaviour, but I expect that to be one of the matters that will be covered in the formal evaluations that are due this September from the 27 forces funded last year.

Dr. Palmer: I look forward to pressing my hon. Friend further in tomorrow's Adjournment debate. Does she agree that one issue that has attracted particularly wide interest is whether the power of detention that some CSOs have has been a significant factor in enabling them to deter antisocial behaviour?

Ms Blears: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work in this field. He has been assiduous in ensuring that his community gets maximum benefit from community

support officers. Powers of detention are being piloted in six areas; they have proved extremely useful on occasion in allowing CSOs a little breathing space in order to check the names and addresses that have been given to them. I am sure that we will learn interesting lessons from those pilots.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does the Minister agree that the undoubted success of CSOs does not detract from the need for additional full uniformed officers; and does she accept the Metropolitan police commissioner's calculation that an extra 6,500 full officers will be required safely to beat-police the streets of London?

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman will know that this Government are putting on to the streets record numbers of police officers, together with community support officers, to provide high-profile visible patrolling that reassures people in our communities. The Home Secretary gave the figures. There are 132,600 police officers: that is a record number, and it is more than 5,000 more than there were when the Government came to power. If the hon. Gentleman talks to senior officers in the Met and to officers on the front line, he will find that they are incredibly grateful for the extra support, resources and backing that the Government have given them in the fight against crime.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Last week, my local newspaper, the *Dorset Echo*, reported on its front page the welcome that was given by shopkeepers in Dorchester—which is in the neighbouring West Dorset constituency of the shadow Home Secretary—to community support officers who, thanks to a Home Office grant for rural areas and market towns, are tackling antisocial behaviour in town centres. Could the Minister attach the same priority to coastal towns, where we have particular problems with antisocial behaviour, especially during the summer months?

Ms Blears: I am delighted that my hon. Friend has found community support officers to be so useful. Last week, I had the opportunity to meet a reporter, Mr. Simon McGee from the *Nottingham Evening Post*, who has been running a fantastic campaign on antisocial behaviour. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) has also been a tremendous support in that regard.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) is right to draw attention to seaside towns. He may know that community support officers have been deployed in such areas—in Rhyl, for example—to ensure that such antisocial behaviour can be controlled.

I should just like to make it clear that, as I speak, the number of police officers is 132,260.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Could the Minister tell us how many police officers could have been employed for the amount of money that has been spent on community support officers? That is surely the only way in which to judge the effectiveness of the idea.

Ms Blears: I am a little disappointed by the hon. Gentleman's lack of imagination in this area. As I am sure that he knows, we seek not only to have record numbers of police officers, but a whole range of other people visibly patrolling on our streets. As I understand it, the figure is approximately half the numbers that we could have had. I would challenge the hon. Gentleman to go to any community where community support officers are patrolling in order to see for himself. He should ask those local people, "Are they good value for money?" I can imagine that the answer that he will get is, "Yes, they are good value for money and they are doing an excellent job."

9. **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham): If he will grant emergency funding for community support officers in Wrexham.
[125062]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Fiona Mactaggart): I am not convinced that emergency funding for community support officers would be effective in avoiding a recurrence of the serious breakdown in public order on the Caia Park estate that was experienced in June. I understand that North Wales police have an action plan in place to deal with any future problems on the estate.

Ian Lucas: I am disappointed by that reply. We have heard much about the effectiveness of community support officers on the streets throughout the country. The people of Wrexham are working hard to deal with the causes of the serious civil disturbances of the past month. For the first time, North Wales police have said that they will support the introduction of community support officers. Will the Under-Secretary meet me and the police to discuss that fact so that community support officers and their benefits can be used to address the difficulties that Caia Park estate and Wrexham face?

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank my hon. Friend for his determined efforts to encourage his local police, especially on the use of community support officers. I recognise that he has persisted in that, and that has been helpful. However, other police forces that had applied in both rounds and been unsuccessful would perceive it as unfair if North Wales police got emergency funding. Basic command unit commander Steve Curtis has made proposals, for example, to consider a policing priority area in Wrexham. That might provide part of the solution.

The key role of community support officers should be to help prevent the sort of disorder that Wrexham experienced rather than tidying up after it has happened. Having community support officers as eyes and ears on the ground, noting, for example, piles of bricks in places where people could chuck them, is one of the best ways in which to prevent such disorder. That is preferable to their dealing with it when it happens.

Drug-related Offences

10. **Mr Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): If he will make a statement on his policy on non-custodial sentencing options for repeat drug-related offences.
[125063]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Caroline Flint): Effective treatment is the key to reducing drug-related crime. The courts have access to sentencing options, including drug treatment and testing orders, community rehabilitation orders or community punishment and rehabilitation orders, drug abstinence orders and drug abstinence requirements. I am pleased that the Criminal Justice Bill will provide for all community orders for adults to be combined into one generic order that can be tailored to the individual offender's requirements, including participation in drug treatment.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I belatedly add my congratulations to the Under-Secretary on her new promotion. I am sure that she is well aware of the Government's drugs strategy, which says that investment in drugs treatment is cost-effective, although perhaps not in the way that the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety envisaged. Nevertheless, the strategy claims that every £1 spent saves the criminal justice system an estimated £3. Does she not agree that the Conservative policy of increasing places for hard drugs young offenders from 2,000 to 20,000, so that every young addict can be treated, makes eminent good sense?

Caroline Flint: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. However, with all due respect, you have to put your money where your mouth is. It is all very well Conservative Members talking about numbers, but given that they are also considering 20 per cent. cuts in public spending, the figures do not add up.

The Government spent £438 million on drug treatment in 2002–03. That figure will increase to £503 million in 2003–04. That is real money for genuine need. We believe that our efforts to target the drug problems that cause crime, including non-custodial sentencing through drug treatment orders, is the way forward. Much remains to be done but the Government are taking the matter seriously and are prepared to put the money where it counts.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): Let me say to my good and hon. Friend that the war against drugs is simply not working. Indeed, much evidence shows that it is a total failure. Drugs are more freely and cheaply available throughout our country and the police are swimming against a tide that they cannot turn back. To be honest, the Government must now be radical: they must either go for total legalisation or start chopping people's hands off. Since I would prefer the former, is it not time for the Government to admit their failure in the war against drugs, and, as in any war that one is losing, to change the strategy entirely?

Caroline Flint: I am afraid that I disagree with my hon. Friend's assumption that we are losing the war. From travelling around the country last week, and speaking to the Association of Chief Police Officers conference on drugs, it is clear that we are making huge inroads into breaking up drugs trafficking. That has resulted in the figures for the people caught for such offences. However, it is widely appreciated and welcomed that we must focus on the class A drugs that cause the most harm to the individual and communities, and lead to crime. That position is endorsed by the police and by those involved in the treatment of people suffering from drug addiction. We shall embark on such a course and continue to keep to it; that is how we shall achieve success and results.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): May I, too, belatedly welcome the hon. Lady to her post, in which she arrived just before I arrived in mine? Does she accept the international surveys that suggest – echoing the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) – that we now have the third highest incidence of hard drug users in the EU after Italy and Luxembourg? Does she also accept that the desperate shortage of in-patient treatment facilities for hard drug users is a large part of the cause of that? Does she really think it right that we have roughly the same number of in-patient beds as Sweden, which has one eighth of the population of the United Kingdom?

Caroline Flint: I welcome the hon. Gentleman back to his Front Bench and thank him for his welcome to me. We now have 3,000 residential places, which is twice as many as five years ago, but it is not enough. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would recognise, however, that residential treatment is not the only answer, and that we also have to provide care for people leaving it. I was in Bristol only a few weeks ago, speaking to people involved in the Bristol drugs project. I spoke to drug users, all of whom had been in residential treatment, and they told me that they had been let down by the aftercare. We have to look at this picture in the round, and ensure that treatment is provided for different needs. I am pleased to say that the provision of services across the board is going up and the waiting times are going down.

Police (North-West)

11. **Jim Dobbin** (Heywood and Middleton): If he will make a statement on his recent funding for extra police officers in the north-west. [125064]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Caroline Flint): In 2003–04, we are providing £36.8 million from the crime fighting fund for 1,367 officers recruited in the north-west between April 2000 and March 2003. Another £591,000 from the CFF will part-fund a further 101 officers for the region. By 30 September 2002, the north-west forces had reached a strength of 18,035 officers, which is 446 more than in 1997.

Jim Dobbin: I thank my hon. Friend for that response. The Rochdale police division which serves my constituents will benefit from about 60 additional officers through that major investment. There is also the new deal for communities in Heywood, which is investing in some high-profile policing as part of its community development. Is my hon. Friend aware that, although crime levels are definitely being reduced across my constituency, they are being reduced even faster in the area that includes the new deal community? Is this

not a good example of the police working with their local community, and of the community supporting the police?

Caroline Flint: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. I should like to give credit to him, because I know that he works very hard to maintain good relationships with the police, including the new chief constable, Mike Todd, and Chief Superintendent Ted Hill of the Rochdale division. My hon. Friend is talking about joined-up thinking. Working communities involve the police, but they also involve dealing with housing and benefits and with the quality of our neighbourhoods and streets and, most importantly, the engagement of the local community. I commend my hon. Friend's local police, because I know that they are keen to encourage the autonomy that will enable more input into police strategies from the communities themselves.

Prisons

12. **Mr. Nick Gibb** (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): What measures he has taken to expand the capacity of existing prisons to meet the forecast average population of the prison estate for 2004. [125065]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): We are modernising and increasing the capacity of the prison estate. Four hundred additional places will be opened at Birmingham later this year, and funding has been secured for a further 2,820 prison places to be built at existing prisons. Two new prisons will be opened at Ashford and Peterborough, and the total usable capacity of the Prison Service estate will be about 78,700 by 2006.

Mr. Gibb: I thank the Minister for that reply, and I am delighted to see him at the Dispatch Box, but, according to Home Office figures, the prison population forecast for 2006 is 91,200, while the prison capacity will be just 77,500. That includes the new prisons to which the Minister has just referred. Does that not mean that the Government are accepting the Lord Woolf approach to sentencing? Does he accept that a policy of shorter sentences has failed over the last 30 years, and that, if it is retained, it will continue to do so?

Paul Goggins: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome, but I must point out that a forecast is a forecast. As of today, the number that we have in prison is 1,000 below the forecast that has been worked up. We clearly have to take action to ensure that we have more custody available to us—4,500 extra places will be available by 2006—but we also have to ensure that credible community alternatives are also available. The Government are ensuring that that balanced approach is followed through.

Constitutional Reform

3.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to repeat a statement made today in another place by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs, which is as follows.

We all recognise the importance of our judiciary and our legal system to security and confidence for our communities. They deal with crime, antisocial behaviour, family and civil disputes and, through the tribunal system, a whole range of subjects that affect daily lives.

We currently have judges of complete independence, probity and very high ability. They are admired all over the world. We need to build on that to ensure that our judges and our legal system are able to meet the challenges of the 21st century. They must continue to be independent—of the Executive and the legislature. They must be able to connect with and reflect our society, and they must be able to be of the highest quality. We must recognise that improvements should occur when confidence is high.

Currently, we have a system whereby all the judiciary—I include in that magistrates and tribunal members—are appointed mainly by, or on the recommendation of, one Cabinet Minister, whereby until 12 June that Cabinet Minister also sat as a judge in the highest court in the land, and whereby before someone becomes a judge in our highest court of appeal, they are first made a Member of the legislature—namely, the House of Lords.

The efforts of former Lord Chancellors, in particular Lord Irvine, have ensured that quality and probity have been maintained, but now we need arrangements that embed existing independence in a way that does not depend on one Minister and which ensures that we have not just a quality judiciary and not just an independent judiciary, but a diverse judiciary that reflects our community.

There has never been a woman appointed to sit in our final court of appeal. There has never been a black or minority ethnic judge appointed to the High Court in England and Wales. We must implement change in a way that carries the confidence of the community, including the legal and judicial community. That means we must consult widely and fully before deciding the full detail of our changes.

Today, the Government are publishing three consultation papers: the first on a supreme court for the UK, the second on an independent judicial appointments commission for England and Wales, and the third on the future of the rank of Queen's counsel. I will deal first with the proposal on a new Supreme Court.

We propose that the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords will cease to exist as the United Kingdom's highest court of appeal, and that the present Lords of Appeal in Ordinary instead form a new separate supreme court. While they are members of that court, they will not sit and vote in the House of Lords. The Government propose to transfer the whole of the present jurisdiction of the Appellate Committee to the new supreme court. The time has come to take the final court of appeal out of the legislature.

The Government also propose, subject to consultation, to transfer from the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council to the new court its present jurisdiction over devolution issues. That will enable us to restore a single apex to the United Kingdom's judicial systems. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council will, however, remain in being to continue its work as the final court of appeal for a number of Commonwealth and Crown dependency jurisdictions.

The supreme court will be a new United Kingdom court. It will stand in exactly the same relationship to the courts in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England and Wales as the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords does now. The independence of those three judicial jurisdictions will be totally respected. Arrangements will be made, as now, to secure appropriate representation for Scottish and Northern Irish judges.

The Government also propose to establish an independent judicial appointments commission for England and Wales to recommend candidates for appointment as judges. At present, judges are effectively selected by the Lord Chancellor. It is unsustainable for a Minister to continue to select judges in this way. The process of selection of judges for appointment in England and Wales must be demonstrably impartial and independent, as it now is in Scotland and will be in Northern Ireland.

Appointments will continue to be made solely on merit but, in addition, a judicial appointments commission will insulate more the appointment of judges from politicians and assist in opening up appointments to some groups of lawyers that are under-represented in the judiciary at the moment, including women, ethnic minorities and, at the higher levels, non-barristers.

The Government propose, subject to consultation, that the new independent judicial appointments commission would make recommendations to the Secretary of State. That model would significantly curtail ministerial involvement by placing the process of selecting candidates in the hands of the commission. The Secretary of State, however, would remain ultimately accountable to Parliament for the actual appointment. The model would therefore preserve the constitutional convention that the Queen acts on the advice of her Ministers.

The Government propose a balance of judicial representatives, legally qualified members and lay members for the commission. We seek views on who should chair it. It is proposed that the members be appointed by a separate appointing body. It would not include Ministers, but would be chaired by a senior civil servant, supported by a senior judge and a senior public figure entirely independent of the judiciary and the Executive. Appointments to the commission would be made under Nolan principles, which would further ensure its independence from Ministers. After the abolition of the post of Lord Chancellor, the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs will remain responsible for ensuring the independence of the

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judiciary in England and Wales within the Cabinet, and consideration should be given to whether that responsibility should be embedded in legislation.

The third of the papers published today is the Government's consultation on the future of the rank of Queen's counsel, which currently designates members of the Bar and a small number of solicitors "senior advocates". The critical issue on QCs is whether the public are best served by the continuation of that rank. If they are, how should the system be changed?

Last year, the Government's wider consultation about the market for legal services aimed to find out how silk, as it is known, was actually used, and whether users were concerned about market distortions. The results, published in May, show that there is indeed some general support for silk, but that there are many concerns about how effective it is as a guide to quality in advocacy. That is why the Government are now publishing a wide-ranging paper that canvasses all the options, from improving the current silk system to abolishing it completely and leaving it to the legal profession to establish how customers are best informed about the quality of services.

Judicial appointments in England and Wales, a Supreme Court and the future of QCs are three vital issues that require detailed consideration. We are determined to ensure, in reaching our conclusions, that we enhance the transparency of our legal system, increase public confidence and bolster the independence of the judiciary from both the Executive and the legislature. In that way we can create a modern legal system that builds on its current independence and quality, ensuring the existence of a better justice system to serve the public.

I commend the papers to the House.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The new Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs is quoted today as saying that he wants to end the Gilbert and Sullivan profusion of roles for the Lord Chancellor. Given the importance of matters that affect the very essence of our system of justice and the future of our constitution, it is to say the least a pity that the proposals of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State began with a theatrical production that put "Iolanthe" to shame, let alone the ministry of silly walks.

My first question to the Minister is this: why are we not being given a White Paper, and a debate on that White Paper in the House? Secondly, where are the transfer of functions orders? Without those, what is the statutory basis for the Minister's role in the House of Commons, especially as the new Department is the fourth largest spending Department? The lack of any such order raises serious issues of accountability for public expenditure in the House.

On 19 June, the Prime Minister told me that the matter would be dealt with once the position of Lord Chancellor had been abolished. As that can be done only by statute, which may be a year away if it comes into being at all, how will the Government deal with the question of financial accountability to the House in the meantime? The Prime Minister is behaving more and more like a Stuart monarch. He should recall the fate of those monarchs.

Thirdly, the Minister says that we have judges of complete independence, probity and very high ability. He says that that must continue. Will he explain how the current system has failed, and why he thinks that the diversity to which he refers could not have been achieved under the present system? Is diversity another word for political correctness? Bias is not exclusively political, but may result from the whim of fashion or alleged rights. It is of course important for us to have a judiciary drawn from the whole community, but is the Minister saying that diversity is more important than merit?

Fourthly, on the supreme court, who will be responsible for the rules of procedure, including the white book, under the proposed system? The Secretary of State is understood to have said that the new supreme court would not have the power to strike down legislation, but does that mean that the power of the Secretary of State to issue prohibition orders on the Scottish Parliament, in relation to reserved matters, will be repealed, and who will deal with excessive use of powers in devolution matters? How will Scottish appeals be dealt with in the light of the Act of Union 1707?

What is the Secretary of State's reason for excluding members of the supreme court from sitting and voting in the other place? That may have certain attractions, but the idea is not welcomed by many. What will be the relationship between the supreme court and the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg as the Supreme Court in Europe? Will the Minister clarify the role of the Law Lords? Will they attend the other place after retirement? Will the supreme court inhabit Somerset house? I hear that the dome is still available — no doubt the Secretary of State will be able to find his way there. In such circumstances, the court will be neither supreme nor a final court of appeal.

Fifthly, on the independent judicial appointments commission, the Minister has already said that we have judges of complete independence, probity and high ability, but he states that it is unsustainable for the Lord Chancellor to continue to select judges. What evidence can he produce to show that the appointment of judges has gone wrong? If the Secretary of State is to remain accountable to Parliament for the actual appointments, as he has stated, how can he not realise that that is bound to involve political interference, especially as, in *The Times* today, he made clear his determination to use his role for political purposes?

The Secretary of State owes it to the House to explain how the new commission will be able to guarantee appointments on merit and be fully independent of the Secretary of State. The Government cannot have it both ways; this is no separation of powers, as the Secretary of State has claimed.

Will it be guaranteed that those appointing the commission will be statutorily prohibited from holding discussions with Ministers or their civil servants? Does the Minister agree that the principle that judges should not be politically appointed should be balanced by the principle that they should not be politically engaged, and that, if they have become so, it is because Parliament has enacted legislation that has encouraged judges not only to interpret the law, but to seek to make it?

One of the criticisms of the role of the Lord Chancellor was that he was dependent on the patronage of the Prime Minister. Can the Minister explain how that has changed?

Can the Minister confirm that there will be no interference with the security of tenure of judges, or of their salaries or pensions, or with the principle established in 1688 that means that they had better behave themselves? How will that be dealt with, if at all, in legislation? Will any discipline of judges be made a matter of public record and will any restrictions be imposed on their making political comments to the media?

How can the Secretary of State confirm that the Lord Chancellor's role in the Cabinet as the arbiter of respect for the rule of law and as the most authoritative and respected member of the Government in matters of proper procedure, fairness and constitutional law will be continued if, as he has said, his successor need not be a lawyer?

Should not the new Secretary of State be answerable directly to the House of Commons? Should not his Department have a fuller Question Time? Will the system of appointments continue the process of advertising posts?

I hope that the Minister will agree that the constitutional responsibility for judicial independence is at the heart of our constitutional government. It is essential for the protection of civil liberties, to stop the abuse of power by the Executive and to ensure judicial neutrality. Does he agree that the essence of the role is fair, efficient and effective administration of justice for the people of this country, and that that role should not have been caught up in the ludicrous pantomime of the reshuffle?

Mr. Leslie: I realise that the hon. Gentleman needed to make some sort of political point, but after that contribution I cannot tell whether he is in favour of an independent judicial appointments commission and a new supreme court or against them. Nevertheless, I shall try my best to answer some of his questions.

The hon. Gentleman asked about Green Papers and White Papers. We have set out in the consultation documents, which are significant, a number of important questions. We seek many views on some of these big constitutional issues. Many views have already been expressed historically. We know, for example, the views of the senior Law Lord and the Bar Council about creating a new supreme court and so on. Indeed, by 7 November—the closing date for consultation—we hope that we will have a full range of representations from which to make some of these crucial decisions.

The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) asked again about the transfer of functions order, about which he is particularly concerned. I understand that that matter will go before the Privy Council in July and that it will come before Parliament in the normal way. We anticipate that there will be good notice for some of those matters, and I will certainly discuss that with him in more detail.

We need to improve judicial appointments and the role of the final court of appeal while confidence in the system is high, not to wait for the system to decay. I believe that that is the right approach. I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's implicit suggestion that merit is somehow incompatible with diversity. By creating a judicial appointments commission that is broader in its scope and has a wider membership, rather than just relying on one Cabinet Minister to make the appointments, we can have the chance of a truly more diverse judiciary, which would be a major advance.

No changes are proposed to the devolution settlement, save for the impact on the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, which currently hears appeals in devolution cases. Now that the supreme court is being taken out of the House of Lords under these proposals, the supreme court would not effectively have a bias or there would be no perception of a conflict of interests because it would not be in Parliament any more, so that would be the only significant impact on devolution in that respect.

We believe that it is important to separate the political and the judicial. That is one of the reasons why the consultation document proposes to take the Law Lords out of the House of Lords, so that they will not sit and vote in the House of Lords. Many people, not just constitutional experts, will be familiar with the rationale behind that move.

I am sorry to say, on the hon. Gentleman's pet subject, that not very many European matters are affected by these proposals, although I am sure that he will no doubt find some in the documents and come back to me at a later date.

On discipline and grievances for the judiciary, clearly the current arrangements for Parliament to express its view on the judiciary in some very extreme circumstances will not be changed. One of the questions in the consultation paper is whether or not the independent judicial appointments commission should have a role in grievance and discipline procedures.

I believe that the question of who appoints the appointers has been thoroughly aired in the consultation paper, and I hope that hon. Members will consider that. There are a number of options, but we believe that, by ensuring that there is a judicial input and the independence of a senior public figure, as well as the chairmanship of a senior civil servant, we will find a way to create a judicial appointments commission that is fair and balanced. Indeed, we have clearly set out that we would like a legal voice, a non-legal voice and a judicial voice on that commission.

The paper contains a number of questions about the role of the Prime Minister in advising the Crown, and answers are sought from those who submit representations during the consultation. I cannot say that I have a view on whether the Department for Constitutional Affairs should have more time at oral parliamentary questions, as that is a matter for the House and its authorities, and I will do whatever I need to do.

I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that, fundamentally, the significant issues that we have set out in the consultation paper are about the transparency and credibility of our judicial system—a judicial system that is important for all people in society, because there are a number of ways in which the law and how it is

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interpreted affect ordinary people. I believe that this is a major change and a major constitutional advance, and I hope that the House will recognise that.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I am grateful to the Minister for early sight of his proposals and even more grateful to the editors of *The Times* and *The Guardian* for even earlier sight of the proposals this morning. The Liberal Democrats largely welcome what the Minister is proposing, not least because they are policies that we have been advocating for some time, even when his predecessors were roundly defending the position of the Lord Chancellor.

On the supreme court, can the Minister confirm that there was little or no consultation with the senior judiciary before this policy was announced and that that omission now needs to be corrected to ensure the proper support of the senior judiciary? Can he tell me whether he intends to have discussions with the representatives of those Commonwealth and other territories that rely on the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council for their senior court of appeal? It would seem anomalous to retain that as an extension for ever in the absence of the role of the judges in another place. Can the Minister answer the question put by the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) about the premises for the supreme court? Does he have any views on where those should be? Does he expect an enhanced role for the Lord Chief Justice in the new judicial arrangements?

On judicial appointments, does the Minister agree that the test of the proposals is whether, at the end of the day, the appointments procedure is seen to be properly independent of political interference, seen to maintain the high quality of the judiciary and seen to achieve the diversity of appointment that we all want? Does he also agree that senior advocates are not necessarily and exclusively the only source of good judicial appointments? Will he look at the proposal that the commission should bring forward a shortlist from which the Secretary of State will still select? I think that that undermines the proposals, and he should look carefully at whether an alternative exists.

Lastly, on the funding of the transitional arrangements, the Minister will know that the resources available to the courts in all divisions, including the lower courts, are extremely stretched at the moment. Will additional funding be made available for the transitional arrangements so that the new supreme court and other arrangements are not set up at the expense of local justice, at the expense of the accessibility of justice, and at the expense of the maintenance of the fabric of the judicial system as it is at present?

Mr. Leslie: The hon. Gentleman, as usual, tried to claim this as a Liberal Democrat idea. I am sure that in some dark recesses of Liberal Democrat manifestoes, they might have alluded to the judiciary at some level or other, which might justify the claim. Nevertheless, he asked a number of specific questions.

First, on consultation with the senior judiciary, clearly, decisions have been made that in principle we want to have a supreme court separate from the legislative branch of government. I believe that the consultation papers will provide the opportunity not only for Members of Parliament but the wider public and the judiciary to express fully their views on some of the fundamental questions that need addressing.

On the question of Commonwealth and dependent territories and whether they will have an input into the changes affecting the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, those are decisions for them. If independent countries wish their appeal mechanisms to come to the Privy Council, we will look to continue that. No change is envisaged at this stage in that respect. Clearly, however, they will have their own views on how they want their legal systems to evolve, and we will respect that.

The hon. Gentleman raised an important question about premises and where a supreme court would be housed. We do not have a fixed view yet, and it would be slightly perverse if we decided that at this early stage, with some of the questions still unanswered in the consultation paper. As the concept of the supreme court takes shape, so we will, as we are doing now, work up our final thoughts on potential premises.

Issues affecting the Lord Chief Justice in some detailed respects are contained in the consultation papers, and I commend those to the hon. Gentleman. It is important—I agree with him to this extent—that we have a judiciary that is seen to be freer of potential political interference. That is why we are seeking much greater independence in the appointments process. A number of suggested models exist for the independent judicial appointments commission. One is to have a shortlist suggesting a number of names to Ministers. Another is for a shortlist of one, effectively. That is the Government's preferred option at this stage but, again, it is open for consultation.

Typically, for a Liberal Democrat, the hon. Gentleman asked about resources, although it is a fair question. We envisage that costs will be associated with the creation of a Supreme Court, given that it will need to be taken out of the House of Lords. We will make sure that provision is made.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the creation of a supreme court is in no way a reflection on the quality of our highest judiciary, which, as I think he implied, is the envy of the world? During the consultation, will he take account of the cardinal principle that appointments must be made on merit, but that merit is not inconsistent with drawing the highest judges from a wider pool? Consideration could be given to such matters as gender, ethnic background and—I declare an interest here—making appointments from the academic legal community.

Mr. Leslie: I am sure that several opportunities would open up as a judicial appointments commission began its work, but it would not be right for me, as a politician, to express a view on who should be appointed in the first flush of appointments to such a commission. I agree with my hon. and learned Friend that the highest judiciary and, indeed, all our judiciary is of extremely high quality and international repute. Probity is the

watchword of the judiciary's work. It is extremely important to bear in mind the point that I made about making improvements now while confidence is high.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): The Minister must surely recognise that this is a new high—or low—in new Labour tosh. The truth is that his statement was based on an unreasoned assertion. I speak as a libertarian, and whatever the faults and demerits of our present system, it has delivered a judiciary that has been able to defend our liberty. No one seriously attacks the processes by which we have reached that. Does the Minister recognise that most of us think that his statement was merely a cover up for a really botched Government reorganisation—the worst in the 19th, 20th or 21st century?

Mr. Leslie: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman takes that view. If he thinks that a Cabinet Minister should sit as a judge, I respectfully disagree with him. He might think that the final court of appeal should be in the legislature and make judgments on matters of public policy, but potential perceived conflicts of interest arise from that. We must not shy away from addressing such anomalies, as we are doing in the consultation paper.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, Central): I welcome my hon. Friend's statement and any attempt to bring the legal profession and, especially, the judiciary into the 20th century. Will he say—*[Interruption.]* That was deliberate. Will he say a little more about the potential effect in Scotland and, especially, will he tell me what consultation has taken place with the Scottish Executive on the proposal? What safeguards will exist to ensure that an appropriate number of Scottish judges serve in the new court? Will he comment on the view expressed by several voices in Scotland that existing arrangements are embedded in the Act of Union and will require special treatment? What consideration have the Government given to that?

Mr. Leslie: I thank my hon. Friend, especially given his legal background, for his questions about Scotland. It is important that we continue to work closely with the Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland Office and although we have responsibility for the Welsh courts, I am conscious of the interest of the National Assembly for Wales. Scotland and Scottish devolved maters will be affected in several ways. For a start, there will be a change regarding the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. We do not envisage any change to the current situation in which no criminal appeals come from Scotland to the House of Lords as the final court of appeal, although issues arise regarding the granting of leave to hear civil cases in the final court of appeal. I urge my hon. Friend to examine the questions about that in the consultation paper and I would welcome his more detailed consideration.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Who will appoint the judicial appointments commission and were the changes instituted because of the adverse report made by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the Lord Chancellor's office? Were the suggestions about a Supreme Court made because of the notorious Hoffman case regarding conflict of interest in the Pinochet trial? Were the changes suggested because of personality: were the excesses of the outgoing Lord Chancellor such that it was deemed appropriate to remove not only him but his office?

Mr. Leslie: I am sorry to disabuse the hon. Gentleman of those views. I know that this will be difficult for the Conservative party to understand, but we are making the change as a matter of principle. It is a major constitutional advance, and I have set out our reasons for the change. On who will appoint the independent judicial appointments commission, the papers suggest some ideas, one of which is to have an independent appointments panel comprising a senior civil servant, senior judge and senior public figure, perhaps independent but available in public life, such as the Commissioner for Public Appointments. That is the right way to deal with who appoints the appointers. Again, I commend those papers to the House.

Dr. Jack Cunningham (Copeland): Is it not obvious that the announcement will be widely welcomed by everyone who is sensible and practical about the long-overdue constitutional reform proposals? Is it not instructive, especially in respect of the supreme court, that ever since 1945, with the reconstruction of Europe and Commonwealth independence, successive British Governments have always insisted on the creation of a supreme court, quite separate from any parliamentary or legislative actions, in the countries that were receiving independence? As it is one issue—the removal of the Law Lords from the House of Lords—raised by the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform, can my hon. Friend tell us when the Government will respond to the other recommendations in that report?

Mr. Leslie: The Government intend to respond shortly to the second report of the Joint Committee. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend's work and stewardship of that body. The creation of an independent judicial appointments commission and the step to have a supreme court taken out of the second House is long overdue. An Act of Parliament was passed as far back as 1873 to do just that, but the Government who followed that Administration decided not to commence it. So here we are ensuring that we take a long-overdue step forward.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): As the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs will remain responsible for ensuring the independence of the judiciary in England and Wales, and as that gentleman will be appointed by the Prime Minister, are we not witnessing the subjugation rather than the separation of powers?

Mr. Leslie: No. The arrangement was that the Lord Chancellor was appointed by the Prime Minister to be a judge while sitting in Cabinet as a politician. As I said, consideration will be given to whether we should enshrine in the responsibilities of the new post of Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs a duty to safeguard the independence of the judiciary. That is one question that we have posed and it merits detailed consideration.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): Before this dotty idea that somehow or other it would be

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politically correct to have women judges escapes from the Tory Front Benches, can we make it crystal clear that confidence in justice is largely brought about by the full involvement of a cross-section of the community in the judicial system? That being so, the fact that we have not had a woman judge is a serious criticism of our system over many years. It is not, however, a criticism of the existing holders of those posts.

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend is right to say that a woman has never been appointed to sit in our final Court of Appeal; nor has a black or minority ethnic judge been appointed to the High Court in England and Wales. Diversity is important. Our judiciary should reflect the public on whose behalf they seek to implement judicial decisions. Creating an independent judicial appointments commission, with a broad spectrum of people doing the job of selection, will enrich the process so that we have a more diverse judiciary that is appointed on merit.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): Surely the Government's announcement represents consultation after the fact because the decision to establish a UK supreme court was taken last month in Downing street at the time of the botched reshuffle. There was certainly no prior consultation in Scotland. It is not clear from today's proposals whether the necessary criterion of independence from the English legal system will be secured for Scotland. Surely the time is now right in post-devolution Scotland to repatriate the final appellate jurisdiction to the Scottish courts. It surely remains an anomaly that the United Kingdom has any jurisdiction over the matter whatever.

Mr. Leslie: The hon. Lady suggests a major change to the arrangements that have worked well for some time under which the House of Lords hears cases as the final Court of Appeal, which we envisage will be conducted through the creation of a UK supreme court. Although there are detailed issues in the consultation paper that affect Scotland, the fundamental separation of the Scottish system will continue and be entirely respected. It is important to keep those separate jurisdictions. It is also important that we have a supreme court that is taken out of the political realm and the second House of Parliament. I hope that the hon. Lady will come round to the view that that is reasonable.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): Does my hon. Friend share my view that all reasonable people will welcome the proposals on judicial appointments and the supreme court as a considerable enhancement of the separation of powers under our unwritten constitution? Will he confirm that the consultation process is precisely that announced at the time of the reshuffle, but that some chose not to hear the message on that day?

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend is entirely right. I know that he has been involved in several discussions and documents that have prompted thought on some of the major issues. Circumscribing the role of Ministers and the power that they have, especially in the appointments process, are important changes. That is a major step forward, which I know that my hon. Friends will welcome.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Does the Minister understand that many of us feel that he has got his priorities wrong? Is this not simply change for the sake of change and at additional cost? What will the new supreme court be able to do that cannot as well be done by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and in the House of Lords? If he wants to make a real improvement, why does he not transfer responsibility for constitutional and legal matters from an unelected Secretary of State sitting in a largely nominated House to an elected Secretary of State sitting in this House?

Mr. Leslie: The creation of the post of Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs is a major advance. It is difficult to see how a Lord Chancellor could be answerable in the House of Commons. The initiative of a Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs should give both Houses an opportunity for further scrutiny and accountability. The right hon. and learned Gentleman suggests that such a matter is a low priority that does not need addressing. If there is a perception of a blurred line between the political and the judicial, surely we all have a duty to address ourselves to it. That is one of the many reasons why we have done so.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): May I add my welcome to that of my hon. Friends for these long-overdue reforms, especially the proposal to establish an independent judicial appointments commission? Serving members of that commission might have an opportunity to become members of the judiciary. What arrangements does my hon. Friend intend to make concerning those appointments either while those people are serving or after their term has ended?

Mr. Leslie: The consultation paper suggests that about 15 people should form the independent judicial appointments commission roughly equal numbers from the judiciary, legal background and non-legal background. It would clearly be inappropriate for members sitting on a judicial appointments commission to hear their own personal applications. I am sure that arrangements can be made, and I shall certainly bear in mind any issues on the matter.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): If the Government are determined to pursue these botched proposals that in respect of judicial appointments will destroy a system that works perfectly well, will they now consider going for elected judges rather than another round of appointed cronies?

Mr. Leslie: The Conservative party seems to innovate policy on its feet from moment to moment. If a Conservative Back Bencher wishes to put forward such views, I suppose that that is entirely possible. We do not envisage having elected judges. We feel that the vast majority of important aspects and criteria of the current judicial system should be kept and enhanced. One way of enhancing that system would be to ensure that the

appointments process is properly seen to be independent, and to ensure that we insulate it from, perhaps, questions of political interference.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I warmly welcome my hon. Friend's statement. Although I agree that the current system works well, it is shocking that a woman has never been appointed to sit in the final Court of Appeal, nor a black and ethnic minority judge appointed to the High Court. Will my hon. Friend ensure that rather than just leaving these matters to the independent judicial appointments commission, he consults widely with community groups and others concerned about the promotion of equality so that we get a more diverse group of people in our highest courts?

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend makes a suggestion that an independent judicial appointments commission could well take forward. It would be a matter for it, in its wider work, to examine new ways of ensuring that applications were brought forward from as wide a range of potential judges as possible. There are issues in the consultation paper that would help to bring forward the extra diversity that my hon. Friend seeks.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): Whatever the merits or otherwise of these proposals, does the Minister understand that as someone who had the privilege of working as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the last Conservative Lord Chancellor, Lord Mackay of Clashfern, I find it particularly difficult to accept that the last Lord Chancellor, Lord Irvine, has been particularly effective in ensuring the quality and probity of the judiciary? I would draw a very different conclusion from the Minister, and it is this: if even Lord Irvine could ensure the quality and probity of the judiciary, the system ain't broke and don't need fixing.

Mr. Leslie: That is a somewhat circuitous argument from the hon. Gentleman. It seems easy for Conservative Members to take pot-shots at the former Lord Chancellor. Actually, he was responsible for a number of major constitutional advances that I think all hon. Members on cold reflection would recognise and appreciate. We are taking new steps to modernise the constitution, and the House should welcome that.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I warmly welcome the Minister's statement. I congratulate him and the Secretary of State on these proposals, which have been proposed after the short period that they have had in office.

First, I heard what my hon. Friend said about elected judges, but if the weight of opinion on consultation favours an election to the commission, will the Government stand in the way of that idea being initiated? Secondly, will my hon. Friend confirm that there will be a new organisation, and that it will not merely be a case of the judicial appointments part of the old Lord Chancellor's Department moving over to the new judicial appointments commission, otherwise, it would be the same people making the recommendations?

Mr. Leslie: On the last point, it is important that we have officials who assist a new independent judicial appointments commission, who can help to bring out some of the fresher ideas that my hon. Friend seeks. As for elected judges and perhaps an elected judicial appointments commission, these are not issues that have been brought out in the consultation paper precisely because we wish to draw a clearer distinction in our constitutional arrangement between the political and the judicial. I believe that that is the history of our constitution, but taken to a more modern phase. We shall consider all the representations as they are made.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Do not these changes, involving the separation of powers, mean that the judiciary and Parliament will become ever more separate from each other? Was it not a thoroughly good thing, and the reason for the system working over the centuries, that the two were linked through the Lord Chancellor? They were also linked because some of our most senior judges in the land were exposed to the pressing issues of the day by sitting in the House of Lords. Does the Minister agree that these changes are likely to lead to further conflict between the judiciary and Parliament, and will not that ultimately be to the detriment of the British people?

Mr. Leslie: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. One of the models posed in the consultation document is for the independent judicial appointments commission to recommend a shortlist of one or a number of names to a Minister of the Crown so that, while the Minister is taken out of the selection process in sifting applications and so forth, the constitutional convention of having a Minister make recommendations to the Crown and then be accountable to Parliament for such recommendations could be preserved. At this stage, we are in favour of a recommended commission model but, again, we wish to consult on it further.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I assure my hon. Friend that for the real radicals, the proposals are not only warmly welcome but long overdue, particularly if they result in fewer judges who went to Oxbridge and public school — *[Interruption.]* I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs Campbell). However, on the supreme court for the United Kingdom, while I encourage my hon. Friend to consult the Scottish Executive and other interests in Scotland, he should take account of the fact that parochialism and self-interest affect some parts of public life in Scotland. In fact, I am beginning to believe that girning is becoming the national sport of Scotland. If there were Olympic medals for girning, the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) would be in line for the gold.

Mr. Leslie: My understanding is that the sport of girning requires its participants to have false teeth, and I would not want to suggest that any hon. Member is in that position. I do not believe that the description of parochialism fits the Scottish public at large, but I accept that we must pay particular care and attention to important and delicate issues affecting the devolution settlement, especially as they apply to the United Kingdom supreme court. I shall certainly bear my right hon. Friend's recommendations in mind.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): In September 1998, the Lord Chancellor's Department introduced new guidelines on the appointment of lay magistrates, saying that the Bench must reflect an area's voting pattern as evidenced by the last two general elections. Given that history, how can we have any confidence at all that the Government will not seek to politicise appointments to the judiciary as well?

Mr. Leslie: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raised that issue about the magistracy because, again, the consultation paper looks at the role of the current Lord Chancellor in the appointments process of the magistracy. We envisage retaining local input in the selection process, but in our view that is best done via a judicial appointments commission, independent of Ministers. The hon. Gentleman made an important point about political balance, which we would not want to upset.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): These are excellent proposals and the Government deserve a pat on the back. I hope that Queen's counsel will be done away with. We do not have queen's surveyors or dentists. QCs are an anachronism and ought to be done away with. Let the market decide.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Is the hon. Gentleman an advocate of the market?

Mr. Prentice: Absolutely—I am new Labour.

May I ask my hon. Friend the Minister about the judicial appointments commission? I take it that it will report annually to Parliament, setting out the criteria that it uses to recommend appointments to the Bench. How long will individuals serve on that commission? I hope that they will not have a lifetime appointment.

Mr. Leslie: The paper includes a recommendation in response to a question about how long members may serve on a judicial appointments commission. There will be mechanisms in place so that such an independent body is accountable through reports to Parliament. On the question of QCs, the Government do not have predetermined answers to the questions that we have set out, but we feel that the rank of QC needs strong justification. If it is to remain, it needs to be of demonstrable benefit to the users of legal services, and such benefit has to outweigh the disadvantages with which the House is familiar.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Is the Minister proud of the way in which he has cynically excluded the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament from the proposals, thus reinforcing the view that the Scottish legal system has been relegated to a footnote in the Government's proposals? As conflict resolution is increasingly common in post-devolution UK, can he address the point made by the hon. Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran)? Exactly how will the Government ensure that there is adequate representation for Scottish judges in the new United Kingdom court?

Mr. Leslie: There are proposals in the document to ensure that we have the right numbers of Scottish and Northern Irish judges in the supreme court and the panels within that. I am surprised to hear those on the Conservative Benches crying for greater consultation with the Scottish Executive and Scottish Parliament, but I heed the hon. Gentleman's comments. We will continue to work closely with both those institutions as we develop the proposals.

Vera Baird (Redcar): I congratulate my hon. Friend on these overdue proposals, which will bring the worst aspects of our legal system screaming—believe me, they will scream, and my hon. Friend should not weaken—into the modern world. The suggestion from the Opposition Front Bench that diversity in the judiciary will endanger quality is an insult to those many women and ethnic minority lawyers who work hard now and who do not get promoted. It is not a sign that the system is working perfectly or that it ain't broke when there is not a single woman judge in the highest court in our country, though there are three good ones, but only three, in the Court of Appeal and six good ones, but only six, in the Queen's Bench Division. Does not the dearth of women and ethnic minorities reflect the secret sounding system whereby white male Oxbridge-educated judges inevitably recommend clones of themselves? QCs—may I turn to that?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I had the impression that I called the hon. and learned Lady to ask a question. Perhaps the Minister could try to answer.

Mr. Leslie: I pay tribute to my hon. and learned Friend for the forensic way in which she posed her question. She recognised that the proposals were a major advance in our constitutional and judicial system, and that it is right that there should be a stronger separation between the executive, the legislative and the judicial branches of our constitution. I cannot wait to hear her views on QCs.

Mr. Bercow: Given his professed commitment to increased independence in judicial appointments, why cannot the hon. Gentleman see at best the unwisdom and at worst the absurdity of proposing for the chairmanship of the body that will choose the members of the judicial appointments commission a senior civil servant who, whether the hon. Gentleman likes it or not, is by instinct, training and contract accountable not to the wider world, but to the Executive?

Mr. Leslie: The hon. Gentleman highlights one proposal in the document relating to the independent judicial appointments commission, and I am grateful for that. These are important issues. I await his detailed and lengthy dissertation on them. I know that he is concerned about who selects those who appoint the judiciary. We share that concern, but we believe that there are arrangements in the paper that will give a measure of extra independence and confidence in the legal system, which all hon. Members seek to achieve.

Points of Order

4.28 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Do you share my concern that we have had yet another Government announcement on policy that was made to the media before it came to the House? I seek your guidance on the proper procedure when that announcement is a reversal—a fundamental U-turn—of a policy statement already made in the Chamber. You will have seen the press reports over the weekend that the Government are planning not to implement the boundary commission recommendations for Scotland before the next general election. During the passage of the Scotland Act 1998 the reduction in the number of Scottish MPs was an olive branch offered to deal with the overrepresentation of Scotland in the Chamber, and also to go some way towards solving the problem of the West Lothian question. Last week in the vote on foundation hospitals, the Government were saved from defeat only—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Angus Robertson (Moray): Further to that point of order—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We will wait to see whether there is a point of order. I must warn the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs Lait). She applied for an urgent question today, which I refused. I hope that she is not seeking a way to reopen that matter. If she has a point of order, I want her to get to the point.

Mrs. Lait: It is with pleasure that I shall get to the point. As this is a fundamental U-turn by the Government, I wonder whether the Secretary of State for Scotland or any other Minister, including the Under-Secretary, have asked whether they can make a statement to this House on this disgraceful change of policy, which will destabilise the devolution settlement and add to the distrust of this Government by the voters.

Mr. Speaker: I sometimes read the Scottish newspapers, and I say to the hon. Lady that she should not believe everything that goes into a newspaper.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago at Prime Minister's questions, the Prime Minister misrepresented my views on the European Union by purportedly quoting me. No. 10 provided *Hansard* with what it said was a direct quote and it was therefore recorded in inverted commas. I raised the matter with you as you are responsible for the accuracy of *Hansard*, and you said that, in your judgment, it was for the hon. or right hon. Member concerned—in other words, the Prime Minister—to correct the record himself. I therefore tabled a parliamentary question seeking that he confirm publicly what he had confirmed in correspondence—that he had not been able to find the source of the misleading quote—but he has now replied denying the inaccuracy of the quote, refusing to withdraw the remark and also refusing to correct the *Official Report*.

This is a serious matter because the Prime Minister is the same as all of us in this House and is responsible for his remarks. He has, on his own admission, misrepresented and misquoted another hon. Member—namely myself. I therefore ask you, Mr. Speaker, to take action, otherwise, what is there to protect any of us against the No. 10 spin machine, in all its distortions and misleading guile, and its propensity even when caught out, to refuse to correct what it has said or indeed supplied to the *Official Report*?

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order about the answer that he has received from the Prime Minister. I am not, however, responsible for the content of written answers given by Ministers. He has set out his argument clearly and it will no doubt be heard. He will have to seek other means than a point of order if he wishes to take this matter further. The Table Office may be able to advise.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful for your ruling, but I now have something else that is misleading—a parliamentary answer that conflicts with the private correspondence that I received, which I am reluctant to put on the public record, as it was a private letter to me from the Prime Minister. In correspondence, the Prime Minister himself was unable to give me the source of the quote and therefore conceded that it was misleading and inaccurate. In an official answer to a parliamentary question that is on the record, he now refuses to do that. He refuses to withdraw his remark, to correct what he has acknowledged to be wrong and inaccurate and to amend and correct the *Official Report*, for which you are responsible. What more can I do when I have a direct contradiction between what the Prime Minister says in private and what he says in public?

Mr. Speaker: I have given the right hon. Gentleman good advice. In this instance, he should go to the Table Office. I would strongly advise that he does that.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. How can we protect the business of this House as set out on the Order Paper by avoiding spurious points of order raised by members of the shadow Cabinet, based on speculation and containing no direct quotation from any Minister? The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) raised such a point of order after having quite properly been refused by you the opportunity to ask an urgent question. That is a disgraceful abuse of the House and she ought to know better.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman does not have to worry. Points of order sometimes give the Speaker a form of exercise.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In response to a written question, the Prime Minister answered a question that I had not asked. However, that is not my reason for raising this point of order. My question referred to British intelligence and Iraq, and the Prime Minister's reply referred me to the inquiry by the Intelligence and Security Committee that is taking place. He concludes:

"Their report on their findings will be published in due course."—[*Official Report*, 11 July 2003; Vol. 408, c. 1059W.]

[Glenda Jackson]

Does that mean that if a Back Bencher asks a question that includes the words "intelligence" or "Iraq", we will be consistently referred to a Select Committee whose meetings and report we do not yet know about? Is not that a way of reducing the power of Back Benchers to ask questions of the Executive?

Mr. Speaker: As the Speaker, I am not responsible for such answers.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): On a genuine point of order, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) mentioned the making of statements outside the House. You, Sir, have often deprecated that, and I wonder if I may suggest a solution. You have charge over the cell at the foot of the Clock Tower. Could you not send to that cell for several hours any Minister who transgresses in future?

Mr. Speaker: I would not comment on that matter.

Angus Robertson (Moray): Further to the point of order concerning boundaries in Scotland, you will be aware, Mr. Speaker, that the reports in a number of newspapers are based on unattributed Government sources who have let it be known that the cut will not be included in the Queen's Speech. Now that there is so much uncertainty about that matter, is it not right and proper that the Government should make a statement about it?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should not read too much into that. He should perhaps read the newspapers, but he should not always believe them. They sometimes get it wrong, as I know from experience.

Communications Bill (Programme) (No. 3)

Motion made, and Question put,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Communications Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Orders of 3rd December 2002 and 10th February 2003:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at this day's sitting and shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption.

2. Those proceedings shall be taken in the order shown in the first column of the following Table, and each part of those proceedings shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the time shown in the second column.

Lords Amendments	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
Nos. 1 and 2	6.00 p.m.
Nos. 3 to 38	7.30 p.m.
Nos. 39 to 114	9.00 p.m.
Nos. 115 to 278	10.00 p.m.

Subsequent stages

3. Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question put.

4. Proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement—*[Tessa Jowell.]*

The House divided: Ayes 306, Noes 165.

Division No. 289] **[4:32 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*

Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Heppell, John
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dan *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Derek Twigg and Margaret Moran

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*

Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Randall and
Mr. Mark Hoban

Question accordingly agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Communications Bill

Lords amendments considered.

4.46 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I draw the House's attention to the fact that privilege is involved in Lords amendments Nos. 155 and 196. If the House agrees to either amendment, I shall ensure that the appropriate entry is made in the Journal.

Clause 3

GENERAL DUTIES OF OFCOM

Lords amendment: No 1

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Government amendments (a) to (c) in lieu thereof and Lords amendments Nos. 4, 6 to 10, 151 and 152.

Tessa Jowell: When Lords amendment No. 1 was considered in another place, it was the will of their lordships that Ofcom be given a principal duty to the citizen and consumer and that, within that duty, the citizen's interest should take precedence. The amendment went on to say that Ofcom should discharge its duty to the consumer and citizen, where appropriate, by promoting competition. The Government can see the appeal of the amendment, particularly the strong attraction of placing the word "citizen" in the legislation. As hon. Members will be aware, the Government had sought not to use that as a legislative term for fear of confusion with legislation on nationality. However, so much has been said in both Houses on the subject that we believe that we can rely on the courts to understand that the citizen interest runs deep through the Bill in the civic sense of the word, applying to such matters as high standards in television and radio, public service broadcasting, universal service for telecoms and the optimal allocation of spectrum.

However, the Government can also see the dangers of such an amendment. Lord Currie, chairman of Ofcom, said in another place:

> "The amendment . . . had a second impact, which was to put the citizen's interest above that of the consumer in the area of broadcasting and spectrum, but not in that of telecoms. That creates different duties in different parts of Ofcom's activities, which will cause difficulty. It will make Ofcom subject to judicial review and may reduce the effectiveness of Ofcom. It will be the big players, not the small players, who will take advantage of that."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 July 2003; Vol. 651, c. 260.]

The Government agree with him. An over-rigid hierarchy of duties could well become a licence for judicial review.

Ofcom must, like the existing broadcast regulators, strive to further the interests of consumers and citizens as appropriate, and with equal vigour. It must also have the necessary flexibility to achieve its aims. We absolutely believe that the consumer interest is usually best served by the promotion of competition, but I am

advised that keeping the Bill as it stands will leave Ofcom vulnerable to legal challenge. In citizen-interest issues, competition is only one possible solution and, more often than not, Ofcom will need to act under its licensing powers. I can assure the House that the Government clearly understand the difference between the interests of consumers and the interests of providers.

Therefore, the Government ask the House to disagree with Lords amendment No. 1 and agree instead with our proposal in amendments (a), (b) and (c). Our amendments would remove any potential dangers in differing interpretations of the previous amendments while retaining the concept that Ofcom shall have a primary duty to citizens and consumers, whose interests shall be equal.

Furthermore, when the duty to the consumer and the duty to the citizen come into conflict, there will be transparency and accountability as a result of our amendments. Ofcom will publish a reasoned statement as soon as possible after a decision, explaining how the duties came into conflict, how Ofcom resolved the conflict, and the reasons behind its decision. The Government believe that that strikes the right balance. The communications industry is not like any other industry; it is central to the health of our society and the health of our democracy.

This is something in which the Government believe, head and heart. It is hard to imagine any Government of this country taking a contrary view. It is also something that the Ofcom board must feel in its head and heart, as was reflected by what Lord Currie said in another place. We understand how important it is for the legislation to reflect it as well, and I believe that, as amended, it will.

When the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee set about its work, it said that it wanted to make a good Bill better. I believe that the whole process of parliamentary scrutiny has made the Bill better, and the changes that the Government are making today will ensure that from beginning to end, our concern to protect the interests of both citizen and consumer will be reflected throughout the Bill.

Beginning at clause 3, with the duty as now formulated, there is a clear link in the logic of the Bill. It now encompasses increased protections for content standards, and proceeds to the plurality test that we will debate later. I commend the changes to the House. I can confirm that, if carried here, they would command the support of both Lord Currie, chairman of Ofcom, and Lord Puttnam, Chairman of the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee, who moved the amendment in another place.

Lords amendment No. 4 requires Ofcom to have regard to the principles of better regulatory practice in all cases. The Government listened to concerns in both Houses and in industry, and were persuaded that the previous drafting left Ofcom a degree of discretion on whether to apply the principles. The amendment removes that element of discretion. We have, however, retained the concept that Ofcom should have regard to the matters set out in this part of the general duties.

It may be helpful if I explain, as my noble Friend Lord Davies of Oldham did in another place, why we believe that that concept is the right one to use here. It will not be sufficient for Ofcom to consider the principles of good regulatory practice for the sake of form only, or to consider them and then reject them for no good reason. That is because for a person or body to have regard to a matter when taking specified action is a substantial legal obligation. If a person or body fails to have regard to the matter in deciding what action to take, or has regard to it in the wrong way, the action taken is liable to be held by a court to be unlawful or legally ineffective.

Lords amendment No. 8 closes a gap by including the interests of the different ethnic communities in the list of things to which Ofcom must have regard when carrying out its functions. We do not envisage Ofcom's having any kind of interventionist role when it comes to the representation of ethnic minorities on screen. I firmly believe that this is a matter for the broadcasting industry to tackle itself, and indeed it is already addressing it, but the amendment strengthens Ofcom's commitment under existing race relations legislation, and will help it to embed diversity in the culture of its organisation.

Lords amendment No. 10 requires Ofcom to include an impact assessment of how the proposal will further or secure the performance of its general duties, or how the performance of those duties will be furthered or secured in relation to the proposal. It is one more provision to ensure that Ofcom operates openly and transparently.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): We are on the home straight, after a long race, which has occupied about eight months. However, we are reaching the point where we can probably achieve consensus on almost every amendment before us. I hope that that is an indication that we are succeeding in improving the Bill.

Looking around the Chamber, I see many of the familiar faces that I have come to know over the past eight months. Both Front-Bench teams have seen some changes. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) who will be joining in the debate from the Back Benches. I note that changes to the Government Front-Bench team mean that the Secretary of State has had to join us this afternoon, as ministerial responsibilities for broadcasting have been translated to the House of Lords. I welcome the Secretary of State's presence and many of us will find it helpful that she is in the Chamber to set out the Government's background thinking about the amendments with an authority that we might otherwise lack. Many people will be interested to hear what she has to say.

The first group of amendments, on general duties, goes to the very heart of Ofcom. We have already spent a great deal of time debating such issues. The main question covers whether Ofcom should necessarily have a general duty to promote the interests of citizens, or the whole of the community, or whichever phrase of the day the Government have chosen, as against the interests of consumers. In Committee, the Opposition tabled an amendment that Ofcom should have regard to the interests of citizens.

Part of the difficulty in considering such issues is that they reflect the general problem of establishing a single regulator with both an economic function and a content function. We have always been sympathetic to bringing the five regulators together in a single body, but it is nevertheless the case that the regulator will have to undertake two very different functions, which may, occasionally, come into conflict.

[Mr. John Whittingdale]

In considering whether there should be a general duty to promote the interests of citizens, we believe that there will always be cases when the national interest will extend beyond the narrower interest of consumers. In Committee, I referred to the desirability of public service broadcasting as an example. Public service broadcasting often caters for extremely small groups, almost by definition in some cases; it does not cater for majority tastes. That is part of the reason why we need public service programmes. We certainly accept that there are wider interests that go beyond those of the few consumers who watch such programmes. It is in the national interest that public service broadcasting should be available for those who might want to watch it in the future.

Similarly, although the roll-out of broadband benefits individual consumers, there is also a wider economic national interest. That, too, should be properly reflected by giving Ofcom these wider responsibilities. The Government amendments accept that Ofcom should have that wider regard to citizens as well as to consumers. We have argued for that for a long time, so obviously we strongly welcome that idea.

Going beyond that proposal, it has also been argued that a hierarchy of duties is needed and that the interests of citizens should be given primacy over considerations. The House of Lords argued for that and, indeed, amended the Bill to take it into account. Furthermore, colleagues on both sides of the House have signed an early-day motion calling on the Government to accept the proposal. However, I, like the Secretary of State, have been influenced by the comments of those whom we are asking to undertake the job of regulating the industry.

The Secretary of State referred to the recent speech by Lord Currie, who is the chairman of Ofcom. She was right to draw attention to the fact that, in his Third Reading speech, he pointed out that if the interests of citizens were given priority over the interests of consumers, it would cause him real difficulties in carrying out his duties as the chairman of Ofcom.

5 pm

I also recently heard Stephen Carter give a speech to the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers, in which he went a little further, saying that he saw real problems if the existing parity between the duties were removed and priority had to be given to one over the other. He gave examples of possible conflicts that might occur in the future. For instance, Ofcom might want to allocate additional spectrum to free view, and it might be argued that that would be desirable, not only in the interests of citizens, but in those of consumers in due course. He pointed to the fact that several existing regulators—particularly the Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority—have a twin duty, and that that has not caused a problem. The regulators are well used to dealing with twin duties, but if one duty were given priority over the other, as the Secretary of State suggested, a decision could be challenged by judicial review, which could cause real difficulties.

I therefore welcome the fact that the Government have attempted to meet the concern expressed in the House of Lords with the amendments that they have tabled today, especially with the additional requirement that Ofcom will have to publish a decision if it sees a conflict between those two objectives. It will need to set out precisely where that conflict lies and why the decision has been reached accordingly. That is an improvement. Given that the Government have proposed that requirement and the fact that Ofcom's chairman and chief executive have expressed concern, I accept the Government's argument that we should not support Lords amendment No. 1, and I am willing to support the Government amendments.

I wish to touch on only one other issue. Among the many listed duties that Ofcom will have to perform, Lords amendment No. 4 will give priority to the requirement that Ofcom abide by the better regulatory principles. Before that amendment, that requirement was No. 2 on a list of 14, and concern was expressed in the industry that it had not been given the importance that it deserved. We argued very strongly in Committee that the better regulation requirement should be put right at the front of Ofcom's general duties, but the Government were not persuaded at the time. I am delighted that the Government now appear to have been persuaded about that because I continue to believe that it is extremely important.

There is no doubt that Ofcom will be an enormously powerful body. I believe and hope that it will be a force for good, but nevertheless safeguards need to be built into its operating principles. In particular, the requirements that regulations should not be excessive and that there should be transparency and accountability are very important. I draw attention to the fact that chairman of the Better Regulation Task Force, David Arculus, recently wrote an article in which he drew attention to the tidal wave of regulation affecting businesses and said:

"Some of the problem lies with independent regulators, who are keen to make the most of the new powers they have been given".

I am sure that Lord Currie and Mr. Carter will not adopt that practice.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): My hon. Friend very generously paid tribute to my efforts as part of the Front-Bench team, and, likewise, I wish to do the same for him, but does he recall making a lengthy and extremely well argued speech on this very matter at the beginning of the process? The length and vigour of his argument was misinterpreted at the time, but does not this example show that the Government now appear to accept most of the arguments that we put from the Opposition Front Bench in Committee? I am very glad that they have done so.

Mr. Whittingdale: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. We may find that a recurring theme in our debates this afternoon is the number of occasions on which arguments that we put in Committee, which appeared not to find favour with the Government, have been adopted by them subsequently. This late conversion is of course extremely welcome—there is nothing like a sinner who repenteth. My hon. Friend is right to draw to the House's attention that Lords amendment No. 4, accepted by the Government, was first advanced by us

in Committee, and I am delighted that the Government have now seen the wisdom of it. It is extremely important.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the whole question of independent regulators being subject to the Better Regulation Task Force came out of the Puttnam report, and a number of references were made when we expressed concern about the independent regulator following Government policy?

Mr. Whittingdale: I would not want to claim exclusive authorship. As the hon. Gentleman, who sat through our debates in Committee, will recognise, however, we advanced the proposal at the time but were sadly unsuccessfully in persuading the Government in Committee. I will not dwell on the matter any longer, however, as we are all now united on the fact that it is important that Ofcom should operate under the better regulatory principles and that those should be given priority. I therefore welcome that amendment. Indeed, I will not oppose the amendments tabled by the Government.

Brian White: Unlike the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), I have been involved in this Bill for two years, as I was involved in the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee and some of the other preparatory work. One of the recurring themes of the White Paper and the Puttnam committee, however, was the issue of citizens. It was disconcerting in Committee to have the parliamentary counsel's advice that judges could not distinguish between "citizen" in terms of how we now understand it and in terms of the amendment, and the narrow definition in terms of nationality. I am glad that that taboo has finally been broken. That raises some questions, however, about the quality of parliamentary counsel's advice and about whether the kind of alternative advice that went to the Puttnam committee means that the monopoly on providing such advice to Government should be subject to some form of competition. No doubt we will return to that issue in due course.

A conflict of interest has always existed among the general duties of Ofcom. It is particularly important that Ofcom will have to explain why it makes particular decisions and how it resolves its conflicts of interests and the decisions that it has made. The part of the Government's amendment that requires that to be reported is therefore extremely important. I hope that it is also included in Ofcom's annual report to Parliament. With that, I welcome the Government amendments.

Nick Harvey (North Devon): As has already been observed, we have followed a long course to get to this point, and it is no surprise that we find ourselves yet again addressing questions of the main duties and citizenship. Those were raised, as has already been observed, in the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee, in the debate on Second Reading and several times in Committee. I am glad that eventually the rather more telling arithmetic in the House of Lords has had the effect that it has, and that the Government have had a late conversion to various points that they stoutly resisted earlier. In particular, they displayed a bizarre reluctance to concede the word "citizen", as has just been mentioned, yet here we are considering at this late stage Government amendments with the word "citizen" in them. I welcome that because it is the right formula and the right approach.

The process has been something of a battle. The first battle was to get the Government to accept that a general public interest—as I think that it was first formulated—existed. Initially, there was great resistance to the idea that there was anything other than a consumer interest. Of course, the two things are very different, and the interests of the wider public are not necessarily the same as the interests of the consumer of a particular product or service.

Brian White: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that that was highlighted in the Government's White Paper that gave rise to the Bill?

Nick Harvey: It might indeed have been highlighted in the Government's White Paper but nevertheless previous amendments that would have inserted such provisions into the Bill were stoutly resisted. I am pleased that we are proceeding by stages. Although such provisions are included in later clauses, the amendments to clause 3 will have far more effect. Lords amendment No. 1 would provide that citizenship issues would be Ofcom's primary responsibility, and the formula in the Government amendments strikes a perfectly sensible balance. We must bear in mind the possible effect of agreeing to a measure that could lead to many cases of judicial review. The Government have framed their amendments sensibly by putting the two duties alongside each other and I am happy enough to support those amendments.

I am pleased that Lords amendment No. 4 provides that better regulation principles will be absolutely at the top of Ofcom's agenda because I spoke up for such a provision in Committee. Ofcom has an incredibly important role and it is only right for it to work in such a way.

I add to the consensus by saying that I am delighted that we have reached a sensible view, even at this late stage. I am happy to support the formula that the Government have suggested.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) said that we had been going through the Bill for some two years. I remember attending a meeting during my second day at the BBC in 1998 in which we debated how we could affect the Government's then forthcoming Bill on communications, so I have been engaged in the process for five years. There has been much talk of sinners repenting—incidentally, we are delighted that Conservative Members have repented their views on the national minimum wage—but I am more reminded of the quotation about the battle done.

The important point behind Lords amendment No. 1 and Government amendments (a) to (c) is that citizens' rights in society should be considered in addition to those of consumers. Many licence payers do not feel like citizens but subjects because the BBC, or whatever body designs the broadcasting ecology around them, often treats them as though they have no rights at all. I am struck by how important it will be for Ofcom to ensure

[Mr. Chris Bryant]

that the broadcasting ecology delivers for ordinary citizens and consumers when it puts the provisions of the amendments into practice.

A matter of immediate concern faces many ordinary consumers and citizens throughout the country, especially those in rural and semi-rural areas where the BBC has made no Freeview service available and there is no provision for cable television. Such people and households had no choice about how to get most of the free-to-air channels unless they bought a digital satellite box and got the free solus card from the BBC. However, they might not get such a card anymore because the BBC decided last week to unilaterally withdraw from the agreement with other broadcasters to deliver all free-to-air channels to households throughout the country.

The problem for Ofcom will be the same as that faced by the Independent Television Commission. The ITC says that it does not have a role to ensure that ITV, Channel 4, S4C and Channel 5 are made available to households that have taken the free-to-air option via satellite television. About 1 million households are directly affected by the situation. If Sky chooses to switch off the solus cards in the next few weeks, those people might be unable to watch "Big Brother" or "Coronation Street" at all. Ironically, having gone down the digital television route, they will have to return to analogue thereby incurring the additional expenditure of buying a new aerial, costing in the region of £150 to £200, and, more importantly, undermining the Government's strategy of getting people to go digital so that we reach analogue switch off in the next five to seven years.

5.15 pm

It is vital that Ofcom takes the issue seriously in terms not just of delivering for consumers through competition rules, but of considering the needs of citizens to have access to a diversity of programming, especially news, from a variety of sources with a variety of voices. I hope that the amendments will enable Ofcom to do precisely that.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am glad to have the opportunity to comment on the amendments. As other hon. Members observed, those of us who sat on the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee have spent at least 14 months on the subject. The amendments reflect the fourth recommendation of the Committee that there should be a hierarchy of duties and that the principal duty should reflect the necessity to further the interests of citizens and consumers. I am grateful that the Government have seen fit to take on board the substance of that recommendation.

Although the Secretary of State rightly did not bore us with the full process, when I moved an amendment in Standing Committee to reflect the views of the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee, the Government resisted the word "citizen", but they intended to accept part of our argument by including a reference to promoting the interests of the community as a whole. It is worth noting that they reflected that thought on Report, but they have rightly gone on to abandon their resistance to the use of the word "citizen". Lords amendment No. 9 defines citizen as a member of public in the UK. As the Secretary of State set out, the terms in which Ministers have explained their amendments in lieu make it clear that that is not to be defined in the context of nationality, but as applying to any member of the public. That is an important provision, which I welcome.

I also welcome the better regulatory principles, which are to be given substance and applied in all cases. That reflects recommendation 24 of the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee to introduce the Better Regulation Task Force principles and to apply them in all cases. It is good to see that. I thank the Secretary of State for taking that recommendation on board.

Members in another place might want to determine whether the substance of their aims has been achieved. I am certain that it has and, as the Secretary of State said, Lord Puttnam would no doubt concur. In so far as there are differences with the Lords proposals, it is possible that those could have given rise to difficulties. The respective interests of citizens and consumers would have been defined in cases before courts rather than by Ofcom, which can take a flexible approach to the merits of individual cases and is accountable directly to us in Parliament.

Members of another place, especially on Third Reading, said there was a lack of appropriate scrutiny of the Bill in this House. That is true to an extent, but it was not so much a case of whether the issues were raised in the House and Standing Committee, because in general they were; it was more a case of the extent to which the Government were willing to consider amendments, especially those with the backing of the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee. I believe that if the Opposition clearly have the better of the argument, the Government should accede to it. That happens pretty rarely. Although the Government regarded the pre-legislative scrutiny as having substantial merit and accepted 120 recommendations, they did not accept some of the most important recommendations. It has been a long time since then.

I share Lord Puttnam's view that it was a pity that Departments did not perceive the Bill as legislation that had made progress through both Houses in co-operation with members of the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee. Pre-legislative scrutiny might have been better in that respect, and should be so in future. If a future Committee is anything like the one in which we participated, its members will become thoroughly familiar with the content of the legislation and how it is intended to work, and issues will be raised in order to give better effect to policy and Parliament's intentions. Members of such Committees could be worked with to a much greater extent than I fear was the case for many months before, as the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) said, the arithmetic in the other place made the Government feel that they had no choice but to co-operate positively and actively. The amendments clearly demonstrate the benefits that flow when that happens.

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): I welcome the Government's amendments on general duties. I particularly celebrate the use of the word "citizen", which has a lineage of at least 2,000 years. It is a progressive and egalitarian term. Now that we have created a precedent for its use in this context,

I very much hope that it can be used in other contexts and by other regulators. The Post Office regulator, Postcomm, would probably benefit from assuming some duties towards citizens and, indeed, consumers.

As the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) said, this has been something of a battle. It would be churlish not to recognise the role of their lordships in sticking to their guns on a cross-party basis. When the Bill left this House with the support of both Front-Bench teams, Lords of all parties, but led by Lord Puttnam, required a certain steel and determination in order to give us a chance to discuss these amendments. They used as a reference point the Puttnam committee report. I welcome the fact that the Government listened.

There is one point that I should like to explore a little more with the Secretary of State. She drew a distinction between consumers and the interests of service providers. The dual duty in favour of consumers and citizens puts Ofcom very much on the side of the little guy or girl as opposed to big businesses. I wonder whether she acknowledges that. Ofcom will be operating in the interests of ordinary members of the public and customers. It will represent the interests of businesses — whether big or small—only as customers of service providers. That gives a clear and welcome focus to Ofcom's work, and is very much in line with the Puttnam committee's original aims.

Tessa Jowell: I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House for their contributions. I endorse the points that have been made about the benefits, particularly for legislation such as this, of pre-legislative scrutiny. I hope that the lessons that have been identified as beneficial to the development of good legislation will be applied in future.

The Government have seriously engaged with the arguments that have been made from whatever source. Disputes in consideration of this Bill have not broken on traditional party political lines. That has been one reason why, especially in another place, we have engaged with such a large number of Members.

To pick up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White), the origins of the debate about citizens and consumers lie in debates in Committee in this House. The Government sought to respond to the well argued points by inserting in the Bill before it went to another place a reference to the community as a whole. That was for a simple technical reason. We were advised that "citizen" had, as my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) has made clear, a specific and narrow use. We have overcome that obstacle, which is why "citizen" now appears in the Bill. I am glad that there is a broad welcome for that.

I am delighted that the proposed amendment to the general duties of Ofcom has attracted such wide support on both sides of the House. I commend the amendment to the House.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) to (c) in lieu agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 4 and 6 to 10, 151 and 152 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 2

Tessa Jowell: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 153, 154, 155 and amendments (a) and (b) thereto, 156 to 187, 189, 191, 192, 231 to 234 and 278.

Tessa Jowell: The amendments will extend the public interest test in the Enterprise Act 2002 to enable a media plurality test to be carried out in the event of a qualifying media merger. The Secretary of State will be able to intervene in such a merger when he or she believes that it will have a damaging effect on plurality. The test will prevent unacceptable levels of cross-media dominance and ensure a minimum level of plurality. The Government will wish to publish guidance setting out our policy on when the Secretary of State is likely to intervene. This guidance, which we hope will be available for consultation in the autumn, will explain that that intervention will normally be only in areas that are not covered by media ownership rules, in particular: national newspapers with more than 20 per cent. of the market and Channel 5; national newspapers with more than 20 per cent. of the market and national radio service; Channel 3; Channel 3 and national radio, Channel 5 and national radio; national radio and national radio.

We do not believe that intervention would normally be necessary where there has never been media ownership restriction, or in areas where there continue to be ownership rules, as the continuing rules will themselves protect plurality.

Mr. Greenway: The introduction of the plurality issue at this late stage has understandably given rise to concern in some parts of the media world, and particularly local radio. The Secretary of State will recall accepting before we commenced consideration of the Bill in Committee that the concentration of ownership of local radio should be moved down from three plus one, the BBC, to only two plus one. Can the right hon. Lady give an assurance to the House that the new subsection (2C) in amendment No. 155 does not undermine the commitment that she gave in respect of two plus one? It concerns local radio that the plurality test, which I do not believe is aimed at it, might nevertheless affect it.

Tessa Jowell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I reiterate that it is not anticipated that the plurality test would apply in those areas where rules have been included in the Bill. It is not intended that there should be further regulation on top of the rules that have been much debated and now form part of the legislation. However, intervention through the plurality test will be at the Secretary of State's discretion, and we would not rule out wider use in extreme or rare cases. There may be some cases including, for instance, satellite news services, where exceptionally—I underline the exceptional nature of such cases, which were raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith)—the Secretary of State may have an interest. However, we do not anticipate

[Tessa Jowell]

frequent intervention in those areas. The Secretary of State will be able to intervene in a media merger to ensure that first, there is sufficient plurality of persons with control of media enterprises serving any audience; secondly, that there is a wide range of high-quality broadcasting that appeals to different tastes and interests; and, thirdly, that there is a genuine commitment to Ofcom's standards code under clause 312.

5.30 pm

Let me now move on to amendments (a) and (b) to Lords amendment No. 155, which were tabled by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale). They seek to ensure that the plurality test will be applicable only to changes of control involving Channel 3, Channel 5 and national radio multiplex licences. We considered writing a narrow test into the Bill. However, in the vital area of media plurality, we consider that the test should be available in the widest range of situations. We concede that on the face of it there is a price to be paid in terms of uncertainty but, as I have already said, the Secretary of State will publish advice and guidance as to the application of the test, which should go a long way towards informing the industry about the Government's proposed approach. That is a much better tactic than adopting a narrow test, which might not be available in a case that merits investigation on plurality grounds but falls outside the criteria that the amendments would insert in the Bill.

We have indicated the cases where we would expect to use the test, and that will be reflected in guidance. I hope that I have made it clear that in exceptional circumstances and if there are genuine plurality concerns, we may want to apply the test more widely. It should also be recognised that, however wide the power, a decision to intervene will still be at the discretion of the Secretary of State. With that explanation, I hope that the amendments will not be pressed to a vote.

Mr. Whittingdale: The Lords amendments introduce a plurality or public interest test that, in many ways, is biggest change to the Bill. However, that change is very late—when the issue was first debated in the Commons, the Government decided that they were not in favour of a change, but their reasons for deciding that it is now necessary are clear to all of us. They have more to do with the Government making sure that they got their business through the House of Lords than any sudden conversion to the merits of the argument. Given that the test has been added to the Bill, it is important to the many broadcasters and, indeed, newspaper groups that may be affected that the Secretary of State make a clear statement about the precise way in which it will operate.

When we talked about the desirability of a plurality test in Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) made the case for it. While I did not agree with everything that he said, he made some strong points, especially when he pointed out that as the test already exists for newspapers, it is curious not to extend it to broadcasters. At the time, I agreed that that was a contradiction—why should something apply in one case, but not the other? It can be argued that the case for a test is stronger for broadcasters than newspapers, especially as there are no barriers to entry in the newspaper industry. On the other hand, an extensive regime in the broadcasting industry already controls content and puts obligations on broadcasters. We have already dealt with that at considerable length elsewhere in the Bill.

Our general approach has always been that the Government were originally correct in their view that the best way to ensure that the broadcasters provided the kind of programming that was thought to be desirable would be through content obligations, rather than by trying to address the issue of ownership. That was the reason originally given for the deregulation that the Bill still achieves, through the removal of some of the existing ownership restrictions. As the Secretary of State knows, we have always supported that.

Nevertheless, we are concerned that the introduction at the last minute of an additional hurdle for anybody seeking to acquire a broadcasting company will undermine the thrust of the Bill, which was to introduce a lighter-touch media ownership regime. At the same time, it will introduce a degree of uncertainty, which it was hoped the Bill would remove. I noticed that the Secretary of State said that the introduction of uncertainty was a price that would have to paid—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Lady corrects me by saying a small price, but when we debated the matter in Committee, the then Minister with responsibility for broadcasting, the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), said that

"it inevitably leads to uncertainty . . . Although businesses may be used to dealing with uncertainty daily, they do not actively seek out uncertainty. We should make clear rules when they are appropriate. If we accepted the amendment"—

which would have introduced a plurality test

"we would effectively be putting those who wanted to acquire media assets in a worse position. In addition to complying with the clear and transparent ownership rules and satisfying the competition authorities, an owner would face the further obstacle of satisfying a plurality test. The Bill is intended to remove regulations, not impose new and unnecessary ones."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 6 February 2003; c. 1002–04.]

I found the Minister quite persuasive on that occasion. I still find him persuasive, so I regret the fact that the Government have retreated from that position and have accepted the calls in another place for the introduction of a plurality test. It is important that we see precisely how it is intended to operate. Much of our concern lies with the scope of the Government's proposals in response to the narrow set of concerns expressed by those who have been arguing for the introduction of such a test.

It is clear from the debates in another place and from the remarks of the Secretary of State this afternoon that those concerns relate to the ownership of Channel 3, Channel 5 and national radio. It has been confirmed that the cases in which the Secretary of State would consider intervening, perhaps with the application of the plurality test, are those where national newspapers with more than 20 per cent. of the market were seeking to acquire Channel 5, where national newspapers with more than 20 per cent. of the market were seeking to acquire a national radio service, mergers and acquisitions affecting Channel 3, Channel 3 seeking to acquire a national radio service, or a merger between national radio services.

Concerns have been expressed about how that will work. In some areas, it seems that restrictions beyond the existing ones will apply. In particular, as the House knows, there is the possibility of a merger between two Channel 3 companies. It would be helpful if the Government could make it clear that the plurality test would not be applied retrospectively if a Carlton-Granada merger, which is currently under consideration by the Competition Commission, went through.

At present, there is no legislative barrier to a merger between regional Channel 3 companies and national radio licensees. The existing restrictions apply only to the national Channel 3 licensee, which is GMTV, and a national radio franchise. Can the Government confirm that it is not their intention to introduce a new restriction by applying the plurality test to regional ITV and national radio mergers? Or will the Government break their pledge to restrict the plurality test to areas where previous rules are being lifted?

As drafted, the plurality test can be applied to all mergers involving broadcasters, or broadcasters and newspapers that qualify for investigation under the Enterprise Act 2002. That could mean that the test will apply to mergers and acquisitions among cable and satellite channels, which have been launched in the UK without any of the special privileges or protections given to broadcasters that use terrestrial frequencies and have until now been subject not to any ownership restrictions, but only to the application of competition law.

Such provision will again create a new layer of regulation and introduce uncertainty into a sector in which there has never been any previous expression of concern. For example, the acquisition of the National Geographic Channel or the History Channel by Discovery Networks is now potentially within the scope of the plurality test, as is the acquisition of additional music channels by MTV. Given the Government's clearly stated aims, why did they not simply produce a test that focused directly and exclusively on the identified problem instead of suddenly introducing at the last minute a sweeping new rule for all broadcasters and then saying that they will disapply it in respect of most of them? The purpose of our amendments is to put in practice what the Secretary of State has said and to limit the plurality test to a relevant merger situation that involves only a change of control in respect of Channels 3 or 5 or a national radio multiplex licence.

The Secretary of State went on to repeat what has already been said by the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting in another place. She said that the Government had considered taking a narrow power, but that there were extreme and rare circumstances in which they might wish to apply the test more widely. She seemed to indicate that it was conceivable that the Government might want to apply the test in respect of satellite news services. However, I am surprised that they wish to apply a plurality test to any cable and satellite channels, even in exceptional circumstances. After all, those considerations have never been applied to those channels before and no one has been pressing for their application. As we heard from the Minister in another place, the Government have made clear in the past their view that such a test is unnecessary.

I am aware that the Government have indicated that they intend to produce guidance on the plurality test that will set out more narrowly how it will be applied in practice. We have made it plain that that is not satisfactory and that, as the guidance has not yet been produced, it is very difficult to judge the merits of the amendments without what will undoubtedly be the most significant part of the Government's proposal. Of course, we understand that the amendments have appeared only in the past few days, so there has not been enough time to produce the guidance, but that is another reason why the Government should have introduced a more targeted plurality test in the Bill. In coming to debate the amendments, we would then at least have had a full package of policy proposals to hand instead of having to rely on the Government's promise of guidance to come.

We have considerable concerns about the fact that the Government have introduced at the last minute a test that they have until now argued was unnecessary, while it also appears that the scope of the test goes considerably further than the areas about which major concern has been expressed. For that reason, we hope that the Secretary of State will give as much detail as she possibly can about precisely how she envisages that the test will operate. I must say to her that its introduction has caused widespread concern throughout the media industry—in the television broadcasting world and among the radio stations and many newspapers.

Nick Harvey: I welcome the arrival of the plurality test—even at this late stage. The introduction of such a test was suggested in the report of the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee. I applaud the endeavours of Lord Puttnam, Lord McNally and Lord Crickhowell, among others, in pressing the case for the plurality test and in marshalling their arguments on ownership issues in a way that led the Government to agree that such a test should be introduced.

I listened with interest to the remarks of the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), who has tabled what I presume to be probing amendments dealing with the scope of the plurality test and how it will apply. He raises interesting and worthwhile points that we should stop to consider. I hope, however, that the Secretary of State will not allow him to tempt her too far in the direction of ruling out the test in all sorts of circumstances. We will start to undermine it if, even at this early stage, we rule out its use in certain circumstances.

5.45 pm

The Secretary of State gave a measured account of the circumstances in which she anticipates that the test will be used. Her remarks will form part of the parliamentary record and, as that is increasingly brought up in legal proceedings, will serve as an indication of what Parliament intended. She also explained that there will be guidance. I am not seeking to minimise the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford—they have some merit—but I appeal to the Secretary of State to address them in her guidance notes, not to get into the business of saying that the plurality test would never be used for A, B or C, because that would undermine the whole point of having it. I admit that it would be inappropriate to use it in some of the instances that the hon. Gentleman described, but that is a decision, come the time, for the Secretary of State of the day and for

[Nick Harvey]

Ofcom, which should use common sense in applying it. It would not be at all helpful unnecessarily to minimise its scope at this stage.

I very much welcome the arrival of the plurality test. The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) has spoken about it on many occasions, not least during the proceedings of the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee, and I am delighted that it is finally here.

Mr. Grogan: I, too, welcome the arrival of the plurality test, which puts strict limits on the deregulatory nature of the Bill. The other place has lined up with Parliaments in other parts of the world in rebelling a little against the efforts of the Executive to deregulate the media sector. For example, in Australia the federal Parliament is resisting similar efforts by the Australian Government to deregulate cross-media ownership; and in the United States, Republican and Democrat Senators are asking the Federal Communications Commission to pause in relation to similar proposals.

If we are honest, the motivation for the changes in another place was based on fears about the deregulation of cross-media controls on the ownership of Channel 5. It was felt that it would perhaps be inappropriate to allow, without a pause for thought, someone who owned, shall we say, 40 per cent. of our Sunday newspaper market, 30 per cent. of our daily newspaper market, and—I throw it in for the sake of another example—our major satellite provider to own a terrestrial television station as well. The plurality test provides the potential for such a pause for thought. I hope that the Secretary of State will stick to a general plurality test. If we started to restrict it to particular circumstances, we would, for example, restrict its application if Ofcom decided to liberalise ownership restrictions in other areas. The plurality test will operate as a safeguard in such a situation. Given that it will be subject to strict guidance, I hope that in extreme circumstances it can have more general application.

I followed with interest every word that the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) said. In 1995, he wrote that famous deregulatory pamphlet, and until this debate I had always seen him as the touchstone of advocating market forces in every possible situation. I think that he has been got at in accepting the general plurality test. I am sure that it is not genuinely in his soul. On 2 July, he wrote in the *Financial Times*, as described in another place, that

"the plurality test undermined the government's desire to relax the laws governing the media. The whole thrust of the communications bill is to liberalise the rules on ownership. A plurality test erects another obstacle in the way of takeovers within the media sector."

A few days previously, he showed a little more uncertainty when he told *The Guardian*:

"My view is that a plurality test has some merit, but it is very difficult to define. I would rather the test applied across the board, however, rather than just to certain companies."

The hon. Gentleman displayed some confusion, and I hope that the plurality test is safe in the hands of any future Conservative Government. However, I am not sure about that.

Let me deal with the charge that the test creates some uncertainty. It does, but Lord Borrie, who has some experience in those matters, is cited in column 909 of the *Official Report, House of Lords* as saying in Committee:

"One cannot deny that during a period of reference there must be uncertainty as to the outcome—otherwise what would be the point of the reference? However, I would suggest that that is a small price to pay for ensuring a free and diverse media. Once ownership is changed, it is exceedingly difficult to revert to square one; the damage may have been done"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 2 July 2003; Vol. 650, c. 909.]

As I said earlier, our debates have a resonance throughout the world. I tried, with varying success, to translate some French, Spanish and Italian newspaper articles on the debates in the other place this morning. I note that an article in a Spanish newspaper about last week's debate translates as,

"Blair is all for foreign investment in the media, but not Murdoch."

Although I am not sure whether Alastair Campbell would have portrayed the plurality test in that light, I believe that, should Rupert Murdoch try to buy Channel 5, the plurality test would have a similar effect to the public interest test, which applied when he tried to buy Manchester United some years ago. After referring the bid to the competition authorities, the Secretary of State decided that it was not in the public interest. Many analysts expect a similar outcome under the plurality test if such a move were made for Channel 5.

Mr. Greenway: I raise a technical point so that the Minister has time to check the matter before 6 pm. Amendment No. 155 refers to clause 368. A group of amendments—I believe that they are Nos. 156 to 187—change "newspaper" to "media". However, there is no amendment to replace the title of the clause, "Newspaper public interest considerations" with "Media public interest considerations". That may be an oversight, or I may have misunderstood, but amendment No. 155 adds an important proposed new subsection to the clause. In that context, the clause's title appears too narrow.

I want to make two brief points. First, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) that introducing the plurality test at this late stage changes the structure. However, unlike other hon. Members who contributed to the debate, I believe that clarity about its application is crucial. I therefore welcome the Secretary of State's confirmation that it does not override the specific competition issues and media ownership aspects in the Bill. It is crucial to understand where Ofcom's first duty lies when it is considering such matters. Clarity is important, and I therefore welcome the Secretary of State's comments, although others clearly did not.

Secondly, it is important to realise that amendment No. 155 deals with not only plurality but two other issues. Paragraph (b) covers the need to ensure that broadcasting

"is both of a high quality and calculated to appeal to a wide variety of tastes and interests".

Paragraph (c) deals with

"the need for persons carrying on media enterprises . . . to have a . . . commitment to the attainment . . . of . . . standards".

The Committee's general view, across the party political divide, is that the objectives are worthy. I introduce only one note of caution, which is covered in other clauses. In imposing obligations on media enterprises, we must have regard to what is affordable. Hon. Members can sometimes become too fixed on what they would like in an ideal world and lose sight of reality and what is affordable. A merger of the two main ITV companies appears to be required because that is economically necessary in the current climate. When we passed the Broadcasting Act 1990, we had to rely on licences to enforce standards. That will remain the case; the licences are the mechanism for enforcing standards.

Some hon. Members may believe that, in the campaign to restrict the size of the media empire that specific people—I shall not name them—may own, a victory has been won over the Government. I am not sure whether they can claim such a victory, but a provision in the measure about economic and commercial viability will be important when Ofcom considers the Bill in future and the way in which it will apply the new powers in amendment No. 155. After all, why do we have the BBC and pay it £2 billion of public money through the licence fee? The answer is, so that we retain a broadcaster to provide programmes that are not commercially viable. We should not always apply such a threshold to commercial broadcasters.

Mr. Lansley: As Lord Puttnam kindly referred to me in another place as the architect of the concept, I am grateful for two minutes in which to speak about it. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) mentioned a problem with the title of a clause. I understand that the crossheads are not part of the measure; they derive from the subject matter of the clause, but they do not dictate it. The title of the clause will change automatically.

I am grateful to the Government for acceding to the arguments for the plurality test. Members of the Joint Scrutiny Committee will recall my argument that its purpose was never to create another hurdle for media mergers that would be the subject of ex ante ownership rules. The intention was for a structure that is designed for long-term future proofing. Ofcom, which is intended to help deregulation, should be able to remove the ownership rules that currently apply, consider subsequent ownership rules, and remove ex ante ownership rules as it can. As my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) pointed out, the merger regime should recognise that broadcasting, like newspapers, has characteristics that relate to the health of our democracy. We unanimously accept that the principal duty is to consumers and citizens. Any merger consideration should also be about consumer interest, as expressed through competition, and the health of our democracy, as expressed through the plurality test. I therefore support amendment No. 155.

Tessa Jowell: I shall be brief. The arguments have been expressed clearly and well. The debate has continued for approximately 18 months since the Bill's scrutiny began. The consideration has focused essentially on the best way in which to secure deregulation, future proofing of the provisions and protection of the public interest in recognition of the specific role that the media play in our society. By general consent, the plurality test in the Bill is an important safeguard. The measure remains deregulatory; it does not add a further layer of regulation and I commend the amendment to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

6 pm

Lords amendment: No. 3

The Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services (Mr. Stephen Timms): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider Government amendment (a) in lieu thereof.

Mr. Timms: Throughout the passage of the Bill, we have made clear our commitment to broadband. We have a target of achieving the most competitive and extensive broadband market in the G7 by 2005, and we have backed that up with a variety of actions and with funding. We now have well over 2 million broadband connections in the United Kingdom, and the rate of growth of more than 100,000 a month is one of the fastest in the world.

We had reservations about whether to include a reference to broadband in the Bill, but we are strongly committed to broadband and we also agree that Ofcom will have a role in encouraging the fair development of the broadband market and in contributing to its competitiveness. As we are giving Ofcom a duty to secure the availability of a wide range of electronic communications services—including broadband services—we questioned whether it was necessary specifically to include the term "broadband" on the face of the legislation. However, given the importance that we attach to broadband, and the widespread support in both Houses for giving Ofcom an obligation to encourage its roll-out and take-up, we have accepted the principle of including a specific reference to it in the general duties. Amendment (a) does no more than ensure that that fits properly within the structure of clause 3 by requiring Ofcom to have regard to the desirability of encouraging the roll-out and take-up of broadband.

I have used the term "broadband" because it is easier to use than "high-speed data transfer" services—the term used in the amendment. The two terms are probably interchangeable in everyday usage, but we have taken the view that "high-speed data transfer services" is preferable as a term for legislation.

Mr. Bryant: Is not this one of the problems with the language involved? Whether we use "broadband" or "high-speed data transfer services", each is a relative term, depending on whether we are talking about 512 kilobytes per second, or 1,000, 1,500, or whatever. This illustrates one of the problems involved in writing this particular element into the Bill.

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. The term that we have adopted—"high-speed data transfer services"—is more likely to retain its currency for

[Mr. Timms]

longer. The term "broadband" could well prove to be an expression of the moment, or at least of the period, in a way that "high-speed data transfer services" will not.

Brian White: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Timms: Yes, I will gladly give way to my hon. Friend, who has taken a close interest in this matter.

Brian White: Will it be Ofcom that decides what constitutes high speed, or will the Government recommend what the definition of that should be?

Mr. Timms: Ofcom will need to take a view on what this duty entails. It will do that in the light of what is happening in the data communications market in relation to those services that one could fairly regard as high speed, given the current state of the market. Of course, that will change as time goes on.

I invite the House to agree to amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 3.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Well, we had a high speed debate there from the Minister. He has rightly seen the light on the road to Damascus, or certainly on the road to the other place. It was the noble Lord, Lord Northesk who raised this issue in the House of Lords. Yet a rather rocky path has been trod with regard to getting this measure recognised in the Bill.

When my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) raised the issue in the Chamber, the normally polite Minister slapped him down, saying

"there is nothing in that new clause that is not already in the Bill, except for the specific reference to broadband. The Bill refers to promoting innovation and encouraging investment—broadband will certainly be the beneficiary of that".

I am glad that the Minister now realises that he might not have been quite right on that occasion. On the promotion of broadband, the Minister went on to say:

"That is, of course, the basis of the Bill. The regulator will have all the powers that the hon. Gentleman advocated"—

that was a reference to my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk—

"as his colleagues who sat through the Committee stage will tell him; but we want the legislation to last, and I therefore think our current formula is right."—[*Official Report*, 4 March 2003; Vol. 400, cc. 738–740.]

I am pleased to hear the Minister tell the House that he now knows that the Bill was wrong. We welcome any sinner who repenteth, and he is right to repent.

The Minister rightly mentioned what the Government have done to promote broadband, but I believe that he protests too much. According to data published as recently as August 2002, South Korea has 9.2 broadband connections per 100 inhabitants, while Britain lags way behind in 20th place. I know that the Minister will say that that information is out of date—he has said such things in the past—and that Britain is now performing well in comparison with its neighbours. But that all comes down to the definition of broadband, as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) pointed out earlier.

Mr. Bryant: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. It is a delight to see him speaking from the Front Bench, I think for the first time. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] In Committee, he made the point that many rural parts of the country—and mining constituencies such as my own—will find it difficult to get broadband rolled out. I would like to point out that my office in Porth is now broadbanded at 512 kilobytes per second, and that Treorchy and Tonypandy will be done later next month.

Michael Fabricant: I am delighted to hear that, although I wonder whether it will really be 512 kilobytes per second. The hon. Gentleman will know that when a number of people are online at the same time, the 512 kilobytes are shared.

That brings me to another point that I wanted to raise. We must acknowledge the value of British Telecom's decision to reduce the trigger level at which it will install broadband, according to the number of people who have expressed an interest in having it. Previously, BT had said that 600 people had to register their interest, but in many areas—including my own constituency of Lichfield—it has now reduced that number, making broadband far more accessible. We welcome that.

The hon. Member for Rhondda asked a very good question earlier about what actually constituted broadband. That was echoed by the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White). What is broadband? One of the problems is that both BT and the Government define it as being as slow—not fast—as 112 kilobytes per second. That is slow! Those of us who have integrated services digital network connections—perhaps to access Citrix, which is the method that we use to access the House of Commons server when we are not in our offices on the parliamentary estate—will know that we need ISDN to provide a reasonably fast connection for that purpose. Those of us who broadcast from our homes need ISDN for that, too. A double ISDN circuit, provided by packages such as BT Home Highway, operates at 112 kilobytes per second. Nobody would say that that was broadband, however; it is merely ISDN2. I give way to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), who used to work for British Telecom.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): The hon. Gentleman is chastising the Minister, but does he not agree that it does not matter how good the equipment is, because people depend on the distant end and how good that is? A lot of his figures sound good but, in effect, we all need to be in the same system for it to work as he is saying.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I chastised the Minister only for claiming that we are doing so well in the international league. Patently, we are not. That is because the definition of broadband that the Government use is patently wrong. It includes very slow mechanisms for transmitting data. That is why Lord Northesk introduced the definition of high-speed data transfer. ISDN is low-speed data transfer; broadband does not include ISDN.

Brian White: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that many of the countries to which he refers have had Government intervention to secure their advantage in broadband. Is he advocating Government intervention, or does he believe that the market will supply broadband?

Michael Fabricant: I never believe that the market alone can provide all that is required in modern society. The Government always have to intervene in one way or another. Whether this Government should intervene by helping to fund BT to ensure the wider and more rapid expansion of true broadband is a matter that the hon. Gentleman will have to put to the Minister.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): It is a great pleasure to see a fellow member of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport at the Dispatch Box. I believe that that is a first for my hon. Friend.

Will my hon. Friend join me in my concern over rural areas? Even if we have a rough idea of what broadband will be in urban areas—I am very glad that BT has, after my intervention, reduced the level of indicated subscriptions required in Wellington in Somerset—in rural areas there are still huge problems about what broadband will be, let alone what size it will be. Could it be satellite or micro-link? In places such as Exmoor, there is no chance whatever of BT building super-highways through the hills.

Michael Fabricant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He is known as a strong advocate for the people of Taunton, and I do not mean just the town of Taunton—or is it the city?

Mr. Flook: The town.

Michael Fabricant: I am always careful about that because Lichfield, although a very small town, is also a cathedral city.

My hon. Friend is also a strong advocate for people who live in rural areas. The Countryside Alliance, among other organisations, has pointed out the huge divide between urban and rural societies over access to broadband. When the Earl of Northesk introduced his amendment No. 5 in another place, which we now welcome, in this great Government conversion, and asked that this matter be included as a function of Ofcom and that the expression "high-speed data transfer" be used instead of "broadband", he pointed out that

> "95 per cent. of urban households have access to a broadband connection, as compared with 7 per cent. for rural households."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 June 2003; Vol. 650, c. 58.]

That is a real problem. It is not a party political difficulty, and it must be addressed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook) asked about other means of broadband connection than cable. Yes, that can be achieved by low-orbit satellite systems—although they have their disadvantages—and by wireless matrix connections.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am delighted to intervene on my hon. Friend and congratulate him very heartily indeed on his promotion to the Front Bench. He and I entered the House together and I am delighted to see him in his post.

My hon. Friend knows that I have been campaigning for a long time to get broadband rolled out in the Cotswolds. I held a conference a week ago last Friday with the Federation of Small Businesses to try to provoke BT into more action on reducing its target thresholds for the small rural exchanges in my constituency. It is quite clear from that conference that alternative wireless technologies, including low-orbiting satellites, are being rolled out rapidly. If BT is not more proactive in its various technologies such as piggybacking exchanges, which we learnt about at the conference, it will simply be left behind. The business men in my constituency consider that there will be technological apartheid, compared with their urban counterparts, if broadband is not rolled out in rural areas.

6.15 pm

Michael Fabricant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I am grateful for his kind comments. We indeed entered the House at the same time. He is a very doughty advocate for his constituents who live in rural areas that are not served by broadband. When the countryside is experiencing such economic difficulty, the Government are quite rightly asking people working in the countryside, particularly farmers, to diversify. One of the means by which they can do that is using web services, but they can use web services, and download pictures quickly only if they are able to use broadband. That is not possible using double ISDN, which, in any other country, would not be classified as broadband. Again, I remind the House that the false claims made by the Government about the expansion of broadband in this country are patently not true.

Another good reason why it is important not to use the term "broadband" was raised by the hon. Member for Rhondda when he mentioned the possibility of there being much faster speeds. I argue that there will be faster speeds. I would use the term "wideband", and there is no doubt in my mind that a time will come, perhaps five, 10 or 15 years from now, when television stations will be able to stream video from any part of the world. Whereas at present we can watch that through services such as Real Networks, which produces a rather herky-jerky picture, as it is known, we will then be able to enjoy pictures every bit as good as digital television is now. Incidentally, that means that the Bill will become almost irrelevant to broadcasting. At that stage, viewers will be able to watch television from any television station in the world that chooses to transmit its systems through wideband.

Mr. Bryant: One is reminded of a song, "You say wideband, I say broadband". None the less, the important point is that the hon. Gentleman seems to be advocating giving widespread grants in rural areas to BT. That would wholly undermine the competitive nature of the market that we are trying to develop. Surely, if there is no killer application that people want to use, the idea of having broadband passing by their

[Mr. Bryant]

houses is almost irrelevant. We need to try to get all the public services in rural areas together to ensure that the applications that could be useful to them are delivered.

Michael Fabricant: Just to put the matter straight, I have advocated no such thing. When I was asked about it by the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East, I suggested that he ask his Front Benchers about it.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to follow the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant), because it is exactly on his point that I want to intervene on my hon. Friend. We could encourage greater roll-out of broadband by using the roll-out that the Government will inevitably have to undertake for schools and to meet their e-commerce targets. Ofcom has a role here, so this Lords amendment is highly pertinent. It was raised during my conference that Chipping Campden school in my constituency gets broadband through a broad pipe, but that businesses surrounding that school cannot get it. Ofcom has a role in ensuring that such anomalies can be sorted out.

Michael Fabricant: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. He is not the only one to have had that argument presented to him. There is a whole argument over whether schools given access to ADSL through a broad pipe should become a node, from which links could be provided to businesses and other people who wish to access broadband. There are some technical difficulties with that over the speed at which data can be transmitted to and fro.

I am sure that the Minister will go into considerable detail about the technical difficulties applying to both ADSL and local networks. One possibility, though, was mentioned earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook), who suggested the use of cells and microwave links for the provision of broadband on a broad—512 kilobytes per second—basis.

Let me stress again the importance of the Government amendment, notwithstanding the lateness of the conversion. We owe a debt of gratitude to Lord Northesk—who was, I believe, one of the first to coin the phrase "high-speed data transfer", recognising that there would be wideband in the future. I hope that the Government will now finally recognise that a speed of 128 kilobytes per second does not constitute broadband. Let me paraphrase what was said by an American senator, changing it ever so slightly: "I have seen broadband, I have met broadband, and believe me, 128 kilobytes per second is no broadband."

John Robertson: I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests—and, unlike some Members who have spoken, I shall try not to rewrite history.

The Bill covers an enormous number and a wide range of issues. As chair of the all-party group on telecommunications, I am pleased to have an opportunity to express my wish for all who want access to broadband to have it. I feel, however, that "broadband" is essentially a brand name: at the end of the day, it is not what communications are about. In Committee, I wanted an assurance from the Minister that the Bill would deal not just with what was currently covered by broadband, but with what would be covered by any band width in the future. Who knows? In the not too distant future there may be infinite band widths covering anything and everything. We probably cannot imagine what might be covered even in the next 50 years.

Significant action will be required from Ofcom. I share the Government's goal of making Britain the most dynamic broadband market in the G7 countries. I appreciate what the Government have already done in appointing an e-envoy charged with the task of promoting roll-out and take-up of broadband, but huge areas of the country have no access to broadband, and we need to do more. The Government must invest in broadband to ensure that it exists in those areas.

Broadband allows access to a greater range of services, and it is about more than just personal need and empowerment. It is of huge economic importance to the United Kingdom. Studies have shown the obvious benefits to community regeneration, but there will be wider economic benefits to the whole nation if we can achieve much wider broadband access than we have now. Without the necessary investment, some parts of the country will have fewer services and perhaps even a lower standard of living. Words are not as important as deeds, and the Government should invest, but unlike other Members—I do not think that a single company should benefit from all the investment.

I share the Government's commitment to widespread broadband provision by 2005. Given its regulatory role, it is essential for Ofcom's general remit to include making universal access to broadband a priority, and for flexible regulation to contribute to that aim. Ofcom should therefore be set specific clear and continuing objectives in regard to broadband development, to ensure the success of broadband in Britain and to overcome the troubles that have been experienced with local loop unbundling. That should feature expressly in the policy framework that Ofcom is set annually by the Government. We should also ensure that universal service is specifically protected and extended.

The Bill will set a framework for the communications industry for the next decade. It should take account of the fact that making broadband available is a huge challenge. We must look ahead. I want to ensure that the Bill covers broadband and its extra use and increasing width, and that we do not have to stick to a limit that is, as it were, bought off the shelf in the marketplace. Future expansion must be covered.

As I have said, I welcome the Bill and endorse the Government's amendment. I am glad that these provisions will soon be on the statute book, but I am keen to enable the Government to improve the Bill further.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I too congratulate the Government on conceding the need for a specific reference to high-speed data transfer services. We have spent a good deal of time discussing a specific form of communications—broadcasting—and an inordinate amount of that time talking about one particular broadcaster, the BBC. I expect that we shall return to that subject later, but many of us consider the internet side of the Bill equally if not more important to where we are going with the communications industry.

Network services continue to become more important. The idea of a dotcom boom followed by a bust, suggesting that the dotcom issue has gone away, is nonsense in the context of what is actually happening to economic growth, and the amount of the economy that now depends on network services in the broadest sense. I believe that the importance of those services to broadcasting will grow over time, and that they deserve a high profile in the Bill.

The term "high-speed data transfer" is correct, although it will and should change over time. I think it right to leave Ofcom as the organisation on the ground, with contact with the industry and able to decide how "high speed" should be defined at any particular stage. I understand that, according to the legally mandated minimum requirement, telecoms providers should currently provide a line that transfers data at 2.4 kilobytes per second, while BT has a self-imposed minimum of 9.6. That provides us with something that is more or less useless as a universal minimum standard.

I see no reason not to have realistically high-speed minimum standards, imposed in a way that would allow the industry to deliver. It makes no sense to say that ADSL must be delivered everywhere via BT lines, because the technology simply does not allow that, but it does make sense to have a floor standard enabling investment decisions to provide technology on an even basis, and to enable that floor to be raised over time. I hope that Ofcom will interpret "high-speed data services" in that sense.

John Robertson: I entirely agree with what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but surely the state of the plant that companies must use would not allow the service for which he asks. Should not the Government invest in the network so that it can be provided?

Mr. Allan: There are instances in which specific Government investment is helpful. That has been taken up by regional development agencies, and I consider it an appropriate form of intervention. My colleagues in Cornwall used objective 1 money for a project to make up for the difference between the cost of BT's putting in the standard equipment that it would have put in anywhere else and the upgrade cost in Cornwall. That, I think, makes sense. I am more worried about cases in which Government investment constitutes a substitute, or creates competitors where there is an existing business—disrupts the market, in other words.

I have mentioned to the Minister concerns raised with me about Scottish Enterprise activity. Providers, including those based in Scotland, argue that the intervention is creating spare capacity where capacity already exists. Our interventions should be carefully targeted. We should recognise that for the vast majority of people in the United Kingdom, the market will provide. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that where it does not provide intervention is appropriate, but intervention should not be in lieu of the market; it should happen in specific cases of market failure.

6.30 pm

Mr. Lansley: Can the hon. Gentleman help to clear up a slight confusion? He says that, as the definition of high-speed data transfer services changes over time, Ofcom will be able to do something in relation to it, but I cannot for the life of me work out what precisely Ofcom is supposed to do in relation to those services that, according to its other duties, it will not be doing in relation to other communications services and networks.

Mr. Allan: The hon. Gentleman makes the case that the Minister made in Committee. He refers back to the general duties of Ofcom, whereby it has responsibility for electronic communications in the wider sense. However, it would be helpful to include the additional wording

"the desirability of encouraging ... high speed data transfer throughout the United Kingdom"

as an objective, as proposed. For example, Oftel has had to adjudicate in a dispute about the relative pricing the IPStream and DataStream services provided by BT, which are two ways of offering broadband services. The arguments made by the players in that field, who are all in the private sector, are about the way in which Oftel's adjudication will affect the development of the market. If Ofcom has that explicit objective—that it is desirable that those high-speed data transfer services spread throughout the UK—it can use that in making such adjudications.

Mr. Lansley: Ofcom's responsibility is, as Oftel's has been, to determine access pricing into BT's network, and the gap between the BT retail price and the wholesale price would apply regardless of the availability of that duty. The hon. Gentleman keeps talking about the requirement that the service be available right across the country, so surely he is talking about a universal service obligation. Is he talking about that, or is he not?

Mr. Allan: The amendment proposes something that is short of a universal service obligation but would be a clear objective for Ofcom. The situation is not the same for Oftel. When Ofcom is making an adjudication and dealing with telecom providers such as BT, it will do so on the basis that one of its objectives is the desirability of access throughout the UK. If there is a clear steer from Ofcom, because it has that objective, it will help to shape the investment decisions of all the companies in the sector, but it is not a substitute for those decisions.

If we all have a common interest in ensuring access to high-speed data services throughout the UK, that additional objective can do no harm. One might argue that it is unnecessary, but to argue that it takes us back is entirely wrong. It could take us forward and it would be helpful to include a specific reference to such access. It does not mean that there is a universal service obligation. That is a separate debate and relates to other clauses that we discussed in Committee.

The key point to note about the desirability of broadband access provision is that broadband is not just faster narrow band; it allows new forms of functionality. Obviously, additional functions kick in with every speed increase. One can do some things at ADSL, the normal BT broadband speeds, while other things can be done only at faster speeds. The hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) referred to video, for example, which will not kick in until a later date. However, as we climb this ladder, new forms of functionality are available on every rung, which are key to the competitiveness of UK industry.

[Mr. Allan]

Competitiveness is the basis for South Korean investment decisions. It stands to reason that businesses that can act more effectively and speedily have a significant competitive advantage over those that are on a slower track.

Michael Fabricant: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if firms are to diversify and to be able to offer certain services by web, they will have to transmit even still pictures relatively fast? Whether they use a local or a distance server, minimum standards of broadband are required, at least something of the order of 400 kilobytes per second and not the low levels that are currently included in the definition of broadband.

Mr. Allan: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that different definitions are used. That relates to the target arguments. The Government have a target to increase use and so they are casting the definition as widely as possible. My sense is that all the telecom providers want to give as fast a service as they can—the faster the service, the more they can charge for it—so there is the prospect of, if not universal coverage, fairly high rates of coverage at 512 kilobytes per second, which is a functional rate for moving around large graphics files. That prospect is within reach.

I hope that the amendment will enable Ofcom to instruct the telecoms on all the issues referred to in other parts of the Bill, as the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) pointed out. There will be a framework so that the companies know that high-speed data transfer throughout the UK is one of Ofcom's desirable objectives and that that will influence its actions as a regulator. Its decisions will be made through the lens of that provision. That will add something, and I am pleased that there is a specific reference to data transfer, as opposed to broadcasting.

Brian White: I fear that we are in danger of repeating the debate on broadband that we held in the Chamber on 1 May. I am astounded by what I have heard. The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) admitted that public interest tests were reasonable, and then the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) agreed that Government intervention in the market was an acceptable way forward, thus turning on its head 20 years of the Tory ideology that the free market will deliver.

Mr. Whittingdale: I should hate the hon. Gentleman go away with the impression that I welcome a public interest test. I made it fairly clear that I was not in favour of the Government's adoption of a public interest test.

Brian White: Some of the other parts of the debate that I found incredible were the references to other countries. The hon. Member for Lichfield talked about South Korea without putting his remarks in the context of that country's economic structure or talking about Government involvement in companies there; for example, the tower blocks are constructed so as to encourage broadband connection. In Germany, the regulator acquiesced in the stifling of competition by Deutsche Telekom. Are the Tories seriously advocating that we should have a national championing of broadband through BT, as some of their comments in the debate suggest? If so, there will be serious problems and we need to address that point.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman is right to note the intervention of the Government of South Korea, but there has been no such intervention in the Netherlands, in Denmark, in Australia nor, surprisingly, in Portugal. All those countries—in fact, 19 countries—are ahead of Britain in the broadband stakes.

Brian White: Earlier, the hon. Gentleman cited figures from August 2002. If he actually looked at the rate of broadband growth over the past few months, he would see that the UK is at the forefront. He should look at those figures rather than relying on historical, out-of-date figures.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman is being generous in giving way to me for a second time.

As I pointed out earlier, the more recent figures are based on definitions of broadband that no other country would accept and that many scientists in this country—including, I suspect, the hon. Gentleman—would never accept. All that has happened is that the definition of broadband has been expanded by the Government to include more services.

Mr. Timms *indicated dissent.*

Michael Fabricant: The Minister may say no, but the Minister knows the truth of the matter.

Brian White: I am sorry to disagree with the hon. Gentleman, with whom I have held several discussions on broadband over the years, but my understanding is that the figures are based on comparable definitions. If I am wrong, I will apologise, but that is my understanding. That is what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and other studies have put forward. The hon. Gentleman should look at the definitions again.

One of my concerns is that although the Lords amendment encouraged competition and markets, the Government amendment does not. Can my hon. Friend the Minister tell us how Ofcom will deal with the provision? Will it have a duty to encourage the markets? If this is about encouraging an incumbent supplier to do more, that is a very different prospect from allowing entrants into the market and the kind of data-stream and internet protocol competition that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) mentioned earlier.

These are serious issues. The House is in danger of latching on to the latest fashion. We did so with local loop unbundling; we are in danger of doing so with broadband. I am very concerned that we will create more problems for ourselves if we accept the amendment. At best, it is neutral. At worst, it is the thin end of the wedge. I am concerned that we will not give Ofcom clear instructions that broadband should be delivered by competition and creating markets. That is the only sustainable way to deliver it.

Mr. Lansley: I had feared, before I heard the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) speak, that I would be in a minority of one on this subject. I have to say hesitantly that, not for the first time, he and I see things more closely than perhaps some of members of our pre-legislative scrutiny Committee and, sometimes, even those who served on the Standing Committee.

Before I enter into the subject matter, I want to join in congratulating and welcoming my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) to the Front Bench. Once again, as he did in Committee on many occasions, he has demonstrated the extent and, often, the depth of his knowledge of technological matters.

I fear that, on this occasion, enthusiasm and knowledge of the technology have diverted some Members from the debate at hand. The debate is not about the desirability or otherwise of further broadband roll-out, or the desirability of functionality at higher speeds and developing new forms of broadband or high-speed data transfer services. All those things are very important and interesting subjects for longer discussions, and they are not least the responsibility of the Government. The question is whether Ofcom should have an additional specific duty, as proposed either by the Lords or by the Government.

My view is that neither of the amendments is necessary and both may be undesirable. Why is that true? Essentially, the problems that might arise are these: if we accept the Lords amendment and give Ofcom the responsibility to consider what are the best means of gaining access to those systems, we introduce to Ofcom an element of picking technological winners that is not evident elsewhere in the Bill and is completely inappropriate to the responsibilities of an independent regulator. If we include, as the Lords amendments does, the specific reference to encouraging competitive markets in such systems, we have to ask why that is necessary. As Ofcom will have a wider responsibility to encourage competitive markets in all electronic networks and services, why is it necessary to specify that requirement? Doing so will simply cause confusion about the nature of the Bill in other respects. Although well motivated, the Lords amendment is deficient in those two respects.

Let us move to the Government amendment, which raises the harmful possibility that the Government could give Ofcom a duty about the development, availability and use of high-speed data transfer services that could conflict with its other duties that relate to the promotion of consumer interests through competition. That would be highly undesirable. We want Ofcom's pro-competitive duty to be clear. Even if we wanted to give Ofcom that duty, is Ofcom the right body to exercise it? It is not; the Government should do so.

Almost everything that I have heard about the desirability of different forms of intervention—we can argue about how much there should be and whether it should simply involve aggregating public sector purchasing, promoting certain technology with grants or developing access in certain areas using subsidy—suggests that those are matters for the Government, not for Ofcom. Ofcom will not have the powers or the resources to do those things.

6.45 pm

The most harmful aspect is that—as the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) said in response to my intervention—the proposal might be short of a universal service obligation. The idea that we must give Ofcom responsibility short of a universal service obligation in relation to high-speed data transfer will simply allow the Government to say, "We gave Ofcom the duty to promote broadband; it may not have done it well enough." I shall not try to interpret the history too much, but Oftel picked local loop unbundling as the way to try to promote broadband. It subsequently said, "If we aren't going to do it, we'll let BT do it, by cutting prices. That will do it for us." Neither of those approaches represents the simple pro-competitive operations on which Oftel should have focused.

Oftel's job was not to promote broadband. Oftel's job was to ensure that the markets were competitive. In so far as that involved diminishing the monopoly aspects of BT's operation, that was what Oftel needed to do. Unfortunately, other questions got left on one side, especially those related to spectrum allocation and the availability of alternative technology, because everyone became focused on local loop unbundling.

The issue now is to define Ofcom's role. Ofcom's role is to provide a competitive market in all electronic communications, networks and services, but if the Government conclude that the economic or social necessity suggests that there should be a universal service in high-speed data transfer services, clause 62 will allow the Government to establish a universal service obligation by order. That is how the Government would need to act. The Government could get off the hook because Ofcom had a subsidiary duty but no power to give effect to it. That could be damaging.

Mr. Bryant: I think that the hon. Gentleman has slightly missed his grammar. Neither the Lords amendment, nor the Government amendment would give Ofcom a new duty. Surely it would have only to exercise its other duties with regard to the desirability of encouraging the availability and use of high-speed data services.

Mr. Lansley: That is not a matter of grammar; it is a matter of interpretation. In relation to clause 3, yes, furthering the interests of citizens and consumers is subsequently qualified by the things to which Ofcom must have regard. We have to consider the way in which Ofcom exercises those duties. The hon. Gentleman will find that, so long as Ofcom asserts the primacy of its consumer interests, it will also have to show that it is giving effect to the subsidiary aspects of its general duties.

All those things are Ofcom's general duties. The risk—I put it no higher than that—is that the Ofcom's subsidiary duty in this respect will come into conflict with its primary duties, and we ought not to countenance that. Moreover, many hon. Members are extolling the benefits of broadband roll-out, and they perhaps think something should be provided for the 10 per cent. of the population that will not have access to BT's broadband or cable. However, when they find that it is uneconomic do to so and they come knocking

[Mr. Lansley]

on the door called "universal service obligation" and the Government say, "Oh no, we can't do that, but we have given Ofcom some responsibility", they will find that this debate will ring hollow because it will not have served our purpose at all; it will have inhibited us from going down the path that will probably be necessary in due course.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): I certainly found the last few speeches quite informative about the range of tensions involved in trying to achieve what is best for our constituents, especially in trying to get new technology and broadband into rural areas. The Minister will know, from having met my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) and myself recently, just how important such things are in areas such as the north-east of Scotland.

The great challenge for that area is that its rurality involves a dispersed population. In many parts of north-east Scotland, there is no constraining physical geography that, as in the highlands, forces people into nodes of population that can be tackled by conventional connections. The population is more dispersed, so the attempt to get such technology into the area is even more challenging, yet it should be a very tempting area, given the importance of the oil and gas industry and the amount of data handled by many people who commute to the city of Aberdeen. The benefits of high-speed data links should be apparent, but there is a worry in the community about how to press forward.

Just lately, the pressure on BT and others seems to have had some effect. For example, the exchange in Drumoak has had its target level reduced to 150 registrations, which is achievable. Another community, Kemnay, already has 300 people signed up, but a target has not been issued. Having listened to the debate, I do not know whether the amendment will improve the situation, but—as the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) said—the universal service obligation is a long-term aspiration. It is certainly a challenge to reach the last bits of the really rural areas.

BT lobbied Members of Parliament last week and told us that it could cover 90 per cent. of the country under the conventional rules that affect the market. It felt that it could cover up to 97 per cent. of the country with some tweaking, but in those last exchanges the number of years that would be needed to see a return on BT's investment would need to be changed. Would the amendment affect Ofcom's ability to allow BT to run the market in a way that would allow that last 7 per cent. of exchanges to be enabled?

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman mentioned exchanges, but BT are doing good work by spreading broadband out in the highlands and islands, and other parts of north-west and north-east Scotland, using the low earth orbit satellite constellation system. It does not involve exchanges and it is another way to supply broadband, but it is costly.

Sir Robert Smith: It also has a problem with the return of data and the ability for two-way communication. A company in my constituency is developing satellite systems, and it is another solution for some rural areas. However, if the regulator can be convinced by BT, the ability to provide the conventional solution for more people will mean that they can use the same equipment in their houses to access the network. They can be on the same wavelength as everyone else and make best use of broadband. In another interesting innovation in my constituency, Scottish Hydro-Electric is using power lines to carry broadband.

Mr. Bryant: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that BT has argued that the reason it has to have the thresholds is for reasons of competition law. It cannot be seen to be subsidising an exchange because that would be anti-competitive against other suppliers. Will the Bill make it possible for BT to surrender that feeble reason for not rolling out broadband?

Sir Robert Smith: That is what I want to hear from the Minister, when he replies. Will the amendment allow those exchanges that BT argues need a greater rate of return to be enabled? That would be the quickest way to ensure that even more constituents gain access to broadband.

John Robertson: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Scottish Hydro-Electric scheme, but that is not a new idea. Companies such as Thus plc have tried to do it in the past. Even British Rail tried it. The problem is that it comes at a cost, and where will the money come from?

Sir Robert Smith: We will find out, because the commercial trials are taking place in my constituency in Stonehaven, where the cost is roughly comparable to that of the BT equipment. It is two-way broadband, and the speed in both directions is the same. One of the greatest complaints that I received at the meeting I held with my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon was what ADSL is not the product that businesses want. They want to be able to send large data files as well as receive them.

The good news from BT was that our exchanges happen to be made by Fujitsu, so it is possible to use a patch to make them into two-way fast exchanges. However, I want to know whether the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire is right and the Government have accepted the amendment to get themselves off the hook and removed from any role in driving broadband forward in rural areas. Will the amendment have any effect on the regulator? Will it allow the regulator to adopt a different model in rural areas to ensure that the maximum number of people benefit in the quickest possible time from this new market?

Mr. Timms: I welcome the fact that we have had a lively and interesting debate about broadband—as we often do. I also welcome the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) to the Front Bench. We enjoyed his contribution and look forward to many more, on these topics and others, in the months ahead. He quoted me correctly when he said that I had argued against the inclusion of the term "broadband" in the Bill, but the amendment uses the alternative term "high-speed data services". That is helpful. The data that we use to compare progress on broadband in the UK are compiled on a consistent basis with the way in which

data are compiled in Europe and elsewhere. That is one of the arguments in favour of using the definition in the Bill, because it is used elsewhere.

When I joined the DTI last year, I was greeted by a headline in one of the computing newspapers that claimed that the UK was neck and neck with Croatia on broadband. We have come a long way since then, as the hon. Gentleman will I am sure acknowledge. He appeared to suggest at one stage that we might include basic rate ISDN in the broadband figures, and that double rate ISDN was equivalent to broadband. We are not including ISDN basic access in the broadband figures, and indeed there is a fundamental difference in that ISDN is not always on, as broadband is. That is a significant benefit of broadband.

Michael Fabricant: Double ISDN is in the order of 112 kilobytes per second

Sir Robert Smith: It is 128.

Michael Fabricant: Yes, that is right. That rate is included in the broadband definition, and that is the point that I was making. The Minister is right to say that ISDN is not always on and has to be dialled up, but that bandwidth is not fast and cannot be used for the projection of graphic images. Therefore, that speed does not fit the definition of broadband and it should not be included.

Mr. Timms: It can be used, but it is slower. We are looking for consistency, to allow us to make comparisons with other countries, as the current definition allows. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) was right to emphasise the importance of the roll-out of broadband across the country. My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) was also right to draw the House's attention to the importance of aggregating the public sector demand—not through subsidy, but with the public sector as a customer for broadband—to increase the level of demand, including in rural areas, to allow the service to be rolled out there.

We are making rapid progress. I have established a rural broadband team in the DTI, which works closely with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality. I am confident that the rapid rate of progress that we have seen lately will continue. I agree with the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) about the importance of the internet. One does sometimes hear ill-informed comments about boom and bust, suggesting that the importance of the internet has waned. He is right to remind the House that that is not the case. We see greater realism in people's approach to the internet, but it will still be extremely important in the future. I also agree about the dangers of distortion of the market through inappropriate subsidies, which the hon. Gentleman also mentioned.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) speaks with great authority on these matters, and did so again this evening. He and the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) spoke of some possible unhelpful approaches to the issue. It is fair enough to question whether the amendment adds much to the Bill, but I do not agree that it is potentially damaging. I suggest that if they look at clause 3, they will see that subsection (2)(b) already refers to

"the availability throughout the United Kingdom of a wide range of electronic communications services".

Subsection (3)(e) refers to

"the desirability of encouraging investment and innovation in relevant markets".

7 pm

What the amendment will do is impose a duty on Ofcom to have regard to the desirability of encouraging broadband in exercising its functions, which will require it to take other decisions, such as the setting of general conditions with which communications providers must comply, in a way that would be more likely than not to encourage broadband. The hon. Gentlemen's misgivings about potential downsides should therefore not cause them concern. The provision will, of course, sit alongside all the existing requirements, including that in subsection (3) about the desirability of promoting competition in relevant markets.

Mr. Lansley: How confident is the Minister, therefore, that were Ofcom to set its general conditions in ways that were designed around that objective, as distinct from those that are provided for in the EU directives, that setting of general conditions would not become subject to legal challenge?

Mr. Timms: I do not think that Ofcom will do that in isolation. It will have regard to all those matters that are required of it, including those, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, that have been derived directly from the directives. Perhaps I ought to agree, too, that this is entirely separate from the universal service obligation process, which, as he says, comes from another part of the Bill. It is important not to confuse those two.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Government amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 3 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 4 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 5

Tessa Jowell: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 33 to 38, 43, 47 to 54, 147, 194, 196, 198 and 205.

Tessa Jowell: Lords amendment No. 5 amends clause 3(3), which sets out a number of matters to which Ofcom must have regard, in particular, in performing its duties under clause 3(1). The amendment adds the purposes of public service television broadcasting to those matters. Those purposes are detailed in clause 260(4) of the Bill.

The Government listened to the strength of argument in another place that the position of public service broadcasting, to which we are fully committed, within Ofcom's general duties should be secured. This amendment does that. I should explain that the reference is to the purposes of public service television

[Tessa Jowell]

broadcasting because that is provided for and defined in the Bill. Public service radio broadcasting, which is not mentioned in the Bill, is provided by the BBC and is secured through the BBC charter and agreement. Amendments Nos. 43, 54 and 198 simply tidy up related parts of the Bill. Amendment No. 198 provides for the construction of the

"purposes of public service television broadcasting in the United Kingdom"

in the Bill, allowing the ad hoc definitions in clauses 226 and 266 to be removed. Amendment No. 33, coupled with the new definition of

"the BBC Charter and Agreement"

in amendment No. 147, enables the BBC charter to confer functions on Ofcom to the same extent as the BBC agreement.

Amendments Nos. 34 to 38, 52, 194, 196 and 205 are consequential and ensure that the policy is applied consistently throughout the Bill. Having reflected further on the arguments put forward by the Opposition on this issue in the House, and again in another place, the Government felt able to accept the principle that it would be right to keep open the possibility of Ofcom's regulatory functions in respect of the BBC—other than those contained in the Bill—being placed in the BBC charter and not solely in the BBC agreement, as the Bill originally provided. Amendments Nos. 47 to 53 add detail to the definition of public service broadcasting in clause 260. The areas to which changes are made are educational programmes, programmes facilitating civic understanding, programmes dealing with religion and other beliefs, and children's and young people's television and drama. I will now set out briefly what each of those changes will achieve.

Amendment No. 47 requires broadcasters to provide comprehensive and authoritative coverage of news and current affairs to facilitate civic understanding, in addition to the requirement that such programmes should facilitate fair and well-informed debate on news and current affairs. This amendment has been made following intense discussion in another place of the importance of broadcasters facilitating understanding of democratic and civic processes, such as proceedings in Parliament.

Amendment No. 48 expands the requirement for broadcasters to provide programmes on educational matters to include

"programmes of an educational nature and ... other programmes of educative value".

This change was introduced to reflect more accurately the Department's policy on this issue, again following concerns both in this House and in another place. The purpose of the amendment is to clarify that the programming covered in clause 260(6)(e) should extend to programmes whose purpose is to educate and which have educational value.

Amendments Nos. 49, 50 and 53 relate to programmes dealing with religion in the public service remit. Two broad changes have been made to this provision. The first, in amendment No. 49, expands the reference to religion in the matters listed in subsection (6) to "religion and other beliefs". Amendment No. 53 defines "belief" to include collective belief in or adherence to ethical systems or philosophies or mystical or transcendental doctrines. The second change, in amendment No. 50, makes it clear that the reference to religion within the remit encompasses both factual programmes about religion such as news, information or the history of different religions and other beliefs and programmes of a religious nature, including those portraying acts of worship and other ceremonies and practices. Amendment No. 53 also defines the term "drama", in response to concerns raised in another place. The definition makes it clear that the term "drama" as used in clause 260(6)(b) includes contemporary and other drama in a variety of different formats. We consider that this new provision encompasses new ideas and new writing, as well as the wide range of formats of television drama.

Amendment No. 51 expands the requirement for programming for children and young people from

"a suitable quantity of high quality and original programmes"

to

"a suitable quantity and range"

of such programmes. Despite the unique status of the provision for children's programming in the public service remit, since it specifies that programming should be both high-quality and original, we accepted that additional safeguards should be made to protect programming for young people. This amendment therefore ensures that a suitable quantity and range of programmes for children and young people will be provided. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Whittingdale: I might have given the impression during earlier proceedings on the Bill that I wish to speak at considerable length whenever the BBC is mentioned. Indeed, that was the impression given by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan), who has now left the Chamber. However, I do not propose to speak at length this evening.

I welcome the fact that the Government have listened to arguments suggesting that the charter should be allowed to incorporate future developments that might lead to Ofcom taking additional responsibilities for the BBC, which my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) suggested in Committee. The Secretary of State knows that one of our principal complaints about the Bill is the fact that the biggest broadcaster in the country is excluded from Ofcom's full regulatory remit. We continue to believe that that is wrong and that it should be corrected in the future. The Government have argued that it would be suitable for the issue to be considered at the time of charter renewal. The amendment is helpful because if the Government decide to extend Ofcom's role to oversee the BBC's activities, the Bill will facilitate that.

Given that everything is wrapped up in the renewal of the BBC's charter, is the Secretary of State able to say more about precisely how that will be undertaken and, especially, about how her Department intends to review the charter's current operation before conclusions are reached about future changes? She knows that we have strong feelings about that. She said in public that there will be a far-reaching review but she has given few details about how it will be carried out.

It is an appropriate time to welcome strongly the Government's agreement in the House of Lords that the BBC should be subject to scrutiny by the National Audit

Office. We argued strongly for that and although we have not achieved 100 per cent. of what we wanted, at least the door of the BBC has been opened to the NAO for the first time. That is in the BBC's interests and certainly in those of the taxpayer, so we have achieved a vastly improved situation.

Mr. Lansley: I, like my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), welcome the Government's acceptance that when the BBC charter is renewed, it might be appropriate for Ofcom to be given functions that would be best specified in the charter rather than in the agreement and the licence. Indeed, the amendments head off at the pass a risk that might have otherwise arisen because subsequent to charter renewal, the BBC governors could have been invited under the agreement to accept Ofcom's responsibilities and functions yet wish, or think that they had a duty, to resist that due to the framing of the agreement. If Parliament wants Ofcom to have responsibilities, it may advise Ministers and they can decide that such responsibilities should be reflected directly in the charter. I welcome that because I argued for it in Committee.

The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) earlier chided parliamentary counsel for their lack of imagination about the word "citizen". One must recognise that parliamentary counsel occasionally must go above and beyond the call of duty—defining beliefs in legislation is certainly beyond the call of duty. I hope that the definition is not tested too much in the courts.

Tessa Jowell: I shall respond briefly to the points that have been made. I expect that we shall publish proposals on how we intend to approach the charter review before Christmas. The process will be wide-ranging and thorough and I hope that it will provide an opportunity for wide-ranging debate so that the public and all those with an interest in the BBC's future may express their view.

7.15 pm

Mr. Lansley: I neglected to mention a point to which the Secretary of State might wish to respond. The Bill suggests that Ofcom will undertake its first review of public service broadcasting probably during the latter part of next year. How does she think that the review will relate to consultation on the BBC charter? Could we reasonably expect that formal consultation on the charter would follow Ofcom's first such review?

Tessa Jowell: It is important to distinguish between the formal and informal process. Of course, a formal process will allow parliamentary scrutiny of early proposals on the charter. The Bill provides for the review of public service broadcasting to be held within a time scale that allows it to inform the charter review process, which is what we intend. We need to get the sequence right, so I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we intend to announce the way in which we aim to approach the process before the end of the year. The first stage is to secure legislation to enable Ofcom to undertake the wide-ranging review of public service broadcasting at an appropriate time. As I said, the review will be an important source of information that may be fed into the charter review process. I promise the House that there will be plenty of opportunities to discuss the methodology and approach of the charter review in addition to the content of the review itself.

I pay tribute to Lord Sharman for his deft and skilful negotiations in another place. The solution that found considerable favour in another place to the vexed question of NAO access to the BBC accounts has taken us to a good position to which we will return at the time of charter review. I have made that position clear throughout the process.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 6 to 10 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 11

Tessa Jowell: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 17 and 18, Lords amendment No. 42, and the Government motion to disagree thereto and Government amendment (a) in lieu thereof, Lords amendment No. 72 and consequential amendments (a) to (e), and Lords amendments Nos. 73 to 93, 119 to 126 and 206.

Tessa Jowell: The amendments, although not directly related, have been grouped together because they deal with a wide range of disability, equal opportunity and training issues. They include placing a new duty on Ofcom to promote equipment that is convenient for use by the widest practical range of users, including people with disabilities. Ofcom will also be required to establish and maintain a committee to advise on the interests of disabled people and of elderly people across its remit.

The reference to the "fair treatment" of disabled people has been replaced with a reference to "equalisation of opportunities", which is the preferred term in recent disability legislation. Lords amendment No. 42 was introduced to require Ofcom to include conditions in the public Teletext licence to ensure that people with sight and/or hearing disabilities can use the service for all the same purposes as people without such disabilities. Though we agree with the spirit of the amendment, we had to address some technical difficulties with the drafting and the placement of the amendment. So we drafted a new amendment in lieu of Lords amendment No. 42, which will be inserted in the correct place.

Lords amendment No. 72 requires Ofcom's code on provisions for the deaf and visually impaired to give guidance on the extent to which applicable services should promote the understanding and enjoyment of programmes by people with a dual sensory impairment. Amendments (a) to (e) are minor consequential amendments. They provide that consultation on the code, and accessibility to it, applies to people who have a dual sensory impairment.

Ofcom will have a duty to include in its code on access to television for people with sensory impairments a requirement that broadcasters make adequate information about the assistance that is available to those who are likely to want to make use of it. In addition, a fixed five-year interim target of 60 per cent.

[Tessa Jowell]

for subtitling has been introduced to ensure that progress towards meeting the main target by the 10th anniversary is accelerated in the early years, with the Secretary of State able to set, by order, a more challenging target where appropriate.

Amendments have been tabled to close a loophole that related to the provision for thresholds in clause 330, below which the requirements for equal opportunities and training would not apply.

Mr. Whittingdale: We spent considerable time in this House and the other place ensuring that the Bill properly caters for the needs of those with hearing or sight disabilities. The Opposition pressed that on a number of different occasions and it is gratifying to find, once again, that one of the things of which we were keen to persuade the Government has been taken up in a Lords amendment. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) asked in Committee for a new clause to give a duty to promote inclusive design. That has resurfaced in a similar form to encourage the wide availability of accessible, easy-to-use equipment. The issue is important. The disability groups feel strongly that the measure is necessary. I am all in favour of giving Ofcom the duty to encourage equipment to be as accessible as possible to people who are deaf or visually impaired and, equally, to ensure that their needs are properly taken into account by the establishment of the panel.

I have a couple of slight concerns. There is always a balance to be struck between ensuring that the broadcasters pay due heed to the needs of people with disabilities while not loading them with too great a burden. There is a requirement that all cable and satellite channels subtitle 80 per cent. of their programmes within 10 years of the legislation coming into force. That target was agreed in discussions with the industry and the disability groups. All the broadcasters have signed up to it.

The Government have gone further, however, by imposing a new interim target of 60 per cent. subtitling for all programming after five years. That front loads the demand on the broadcaster to move towards greater subtitling so that they have to achieve more than 50 per cent. of the target within five years rather than 10. The full target of 80 per cent. subtitling could cost nearly £900,000 per channel annually. I am not going to disagree with the amendment, but I hope that the Government will bear in mind that the target is demanding and will have considerable cost implications. For many broadcasters, £900,000 is an easily affordable sum, but small struggling niche channels will find it hard to meet that cost.

I am also concerned that amendment No. 88 provides that if a channel has voluntarily fulfilled its 60 per cent. interim subtitling requirement before the five-year deadline, the interim requirement can be increased by the Secretary of State. That would give those who have acted in a thoroughly commendable fashion by reaching their target early an even more demanding target to meet on top. That could act as a disincentive to channels to reach the target of 60 per cent. before the five years have expired. Apart from those points, however, I do not disagree with the amendments.

John Robertson: I want the Secretary of State to assure me that the needs of disabled persons working in the telecommunications industry will be addressed. The Bill mentions broadcasters, but does not mention telecommunications. I raised that in Committee. When Lord Gordon tried to amend the Bill, he said:

> "If the object of this Bill is to bring together telecommunications and broadcasting, it seems a little lopsided, to say the least, that the training provision applies solely to broadcasting."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 26 June 2003; Vol. 650, c. 396.]

I ask the Secretary of State to consider that.

Tessa Jowell: The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) is right: we are front loading the cost of subtitling. I hope that I have made clear our reasons for that. Other hon. Members on both sides of the House and in another place have certainly made the reasons clear. The cost of subtitling is decreasing all the time. That is why we have acted as we have. It is also worth noting that Ofcom has the power to exempt services, taking into account the cost if that is properly justified.

In response to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), the Government are constrained by legislation. I remind him that last week we published the White Paper on skills, the focus of which is to ensure not only that our industries maximise productivity through a trained and skilled work force, but that we draw from the widest range of people across the community in developing access to skills and training. I attended an event earlier today at which Barbara Cassani, the chair of the London Olympic bid committee, forcefully made the point that diversity in recruiting for the Olympics is important because in that way we recruit the best. The same applies to telecoms and broadcasters in recruiting from the range of talent, which obviously also includes people with disabilities.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 12 agreed to.

It being half-past Seven o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of the business to be concluded at that hour, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Lords amendments Nos. 3 to 38 agreed to.

Clause 199

BORROWING LIMIT FOR C4C

Lords amendment: No.39.

7.30 pm

Mr. Timms: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 40, 41, 146, 195, 197, 199, 201, 202, 204, 207 to 214, 224, 225, 227 to 230, 264, 265, 274, 276 and 277.

Mr. Timms: The amendments are not related, but they are all technical. Lords amendment No. 39 clarifies

that the power to set a borrowing limit for the Channel 4 Corporation is exercisable by order by adding the words "by order" to subsection (1) of clause 199. A number of drafting and minor amendments of various kinds follow.

Lords amendment No. 195 corrects the drafting of clause 386(2)(f) so that it uses the term

"an international obligation of the United Kingdom",

which is defined in clause 398, instead of simply referring to "an international obligation", which is not. Lords amendment No. 199 corrects an error in clause 398.

The Bill provides for television multiplex services or general multiplex services to carry digital radio services. Consequential amendments were necessary to ensure that the penalties for contraventions relating to digital radio programme services take that into account. Some of the provisions necessary to achieve that were already in the Bill, but other such amendments needed to be made. That is the purpose of amendments Nos. 207 to 214, 224, 225, 227 to 230 and 274. They also make some minor corrections to related amendments to schedules 13 and 15.

Amendments Nos. 264 and 265 are designed to clarify the effect of certain transitional provisions relating to newspaper mergers set out in schedule 18. Lords amendment No. 264 ensures that the powers to make orders containing transitional and consequential amendments set out in subsections (2) and (3) of section 276 and section 277 of the Enterprise Act 2002 apply to transfers of newspapers or newspaper assets that take place prior to the newspaper merger provisions in the Bill coming into force. Lords amendment No. 265 clarifies that clause 395 does not apply to the order-making power under section 91(6)(a) of the Enterprise Act. That order-making power remains governed by the general provisions that apply to order-making powers in part 3 of that Act—in section 124.

Lords amendment No. 276 corrects a minor drafting error in the repeal schedule. It is consequent on an amendment made on Report and reinstates an omitted conjunction. Lords amendment No. 277 makes a minor amendment to the European Parliament (Representation) Act 2003 to amend the definition of "programme services" used in that Act to take account of changes introduced by the Bill to the provisions on which that definition relies.

Lords amendments Nos. 40 and 41 are drafting amendments that replace the references to television broadcasting services in clause 202(4) with references to television programme services. That aligns subsection (4) with the remainder of the clause. Lords amendment No. 146 is a minor amendment to correct a drafting error. Lords amendment No. 199 aligns the definition of consumers in clause 398 with the definition of customers in the clause by inserting the words "or in connection with" in subsection (5)(a). Lords amendment No. 197 corrects an error in clause 396(6). The change in wording will require Ofcom to allow a period of not less than one month for representations to be made on any proposal by it to make an order or regulations.

Lords amendment No. 201 is a minor drafting correction. Lords amendment No. 202 has been drafted to allow any order under clause 403 bringing provisions of the Bill into force to make transitional or transitory provisions in that connection. That will give greater flexibility to ensure a smooth transition from the existing law to the new legal regime in the Bill. Lords amendment No. 204 is also a minor amendment that makes specific provision for Scottish partnerships in relation to the contempt of court provisions in schedule 11. I commend the amendments to the House.

Michael Fabricant: As the Minister has said, these are on the whole minor amendments that merely restructure the Bill to make it more readable and legal. However, it is interesting to note that when the Bill was considered in this House, we were told, in effect, that it was perfect. Every time the Opposition tabled amendments to try to make the Bill more appropriate or legally viable, we were told that they were not necessary. I am therefore pleased that the Minister has accepted that, like so many Bills that Governments of all parties introduce, this perfect Bill required amendment.

I wanted particularly to ask the Minister a question about Lords amendment No. 39. It is a simple but interesting amendment, as it amends clause 199 by inserting "by order". Clause 199 is not so short. As the Minister said, it deals with the borrowing limits for C4C. Does the provision apply only to C4C, or does it apply also to S4C, and is a similar amendment necessary as a result? Both channels operate within a similar structure, as they are owned by the former Independent Broadcasting Authority, which is now the Independent Television Commission.

As the Minister said, the order refers to the limit on borrowing. Subsection (2) refers to the sum that the outstanding borrowing must not at any time exceed, but does it also provide for any regulation of the interest rates payable by C4C? Is there any obligation on C4C to seek alternative sources of funding to ensure that the moneys are not borrowed at a rate that it would be difficult for C4C to repay without damaging programming? Finally, will the Minister explain precisely where at present C4C receives its funding from when it borrows as opposed to the funding that it receives from advertising revenue?

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Will my hon. Friend explain why he has not drawn attention to subsection (6), which requires that the Treasury's consent is required for an order to be made under this part of the Bill? Can he conceive of any circumstances in which any Secretary of State could make an order without the Treasury knowing and giving its consent? Does he know of any other occasion where it is necessary to make this provision? After all, it is one of those open secrets that the House knows but to which it does not usually refer.

Michael Fabricant: My right hon. Friend has raised an interesting and important point. I am tempted to speculate whether it is the power of the present Chancellor of the Exchequer that has managed to produce subsection (6), which provides specifically that the Treasury's consent is required for the making of the order. The question needs to be addressed by the Minister. Does the hon. Gentleman have any explanation for why "order" is referred in subsection (2) but not in subsection (1), except by the amendment that is before us? Is this merely a correction, or is there a subplot, as alluded to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer)?

[Michael Fabricant]

These are important questions that need to be answered. In future years, when we deal with other issues that arise from our consideration of Bills, will the Minister accept that Bills are not always perfect in their drafting, and that sometimes the Opposition will come up with proposals that perhaps the Minister could accept – rather than us having to wait until this late stage of consideration for his acceptance?

Mr. Timms: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing the attention of the House to Lords amendment No. 39 and clause 199, and for the searching questions that he has raised about the contents of the clause. We never said in Committee that the Bill was perfect. We said that it was a good Bill, but he will recall, as a member of the Committee, that there were several occasions in Committee when we accepted amendments tabled by his hon. Friends. We certainly never claimed that the Bill was without flaw.

I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that there is not any subplot as he feared. The reason for the amendment is to add to subsection (1) at the end "by order", so that that leads on to the references to the order in subsection (2). The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) asked about the requirement for the Treasury to give its consent. That is a common feature of many pieces of legislation, including those for which the right hon. Gentleman was responsible in the past. The requirement in the Bill is not an innovation.

The House can be reassured that this is an unexceptional amendment. It is designed to clarify—perhaps slightly to correct—the form of words in the Bill.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 42 disagreed to.

Government amendment (a) in lieu agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 43 agreed to.

Clause 245

SERVICES THAT ARE NOT RADIO LICENSABLE CONTENT SERVICES

Lords amendment: No. 44.

7.45 pm

Tessa Jowell: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 45, 46, 55, 69 to 71, 94 to 114, 128, 129, 132 to 145, 149, 150, 216 to 218, 221, 222 and 269 to 271.

Tessa Jowell: These amendments deal with diverse broadcasting regulatory provisions. They make changes to the provisions on electronic programme guides, amendments Nos. 44, 45, 94 to 97 and 150; the renewal of radio multiplex licences, No. 46; must-provide services, No. 55; regional programming, Nos. 69 to 71; radio localness, Nos. 98 to 113, 136 and 140; broadcasting competition, No. 114; advertising agencies, Nos. 128 and 129, 269 and 271; change of control, Nos. 132 to 135, 137 and 138, 216 to 218 and 221; meaning of control, Nos. 139, 222 and 270; and access radio, which we intend to refer to as community radio, Nos. 141 to 145; and a minor drafting error, No. 149.

I do not expect that these amendments will prove controversial, and I am happy to commend them to the House. However, I would be happy to go through them in more detail if hon. Members so wished.

Mr. Whittingdale: A considerable array of different issues seems to be grouped together, but there seems to be a familiar theme. Many of the amendments relate to issues that in the past we promoted at considerable length, but at the time we failed to persuade the Government of their merits. Now they reappear on the amendment paper from another place in the form of amendments that seek to make precisely the changes that we were advocating originally.

A matter of huge importance to the radio industry is the definition of localness when it comes to radio stations. The Secretary of State will recall that we spent some time in Committee considering the issue. We also had a quite lengthy debate on Report, during which we argued strongly that what mattered to people in identifying with their local station was what it broadcast, the fact that the content of programmes should be local and that the way in which localness is defined when it comes to examining individual local radio stations is the content broadcast. A number of the other requirements that were originally within the Bill—the employment of local people and stations' headquarters being located within the community—seemed to us not to be appropriate for regulation by Government and had little bearing to most people on whether they regarded their station as local. We made those points quite strongly, and we were supported by the radio companies, but without success. It appears that the Government have seen the light, and that is something that we welcome strongly.

Another issue that we spent quite a lot of time debating in Committee was the meaning of control, which has cropped up today as Lords amendment No. 139. We have been pressing the substance of that amendment for some time, as we have always thought that a simple inflexible 20 per cent. shareholding threshold was not an accurate reflection of the ability to control, and may well catch shareholdings that do not confer the means to control or significantly influence another company. We therefore argued that it was wrong that the provisions placed the burden of rebutting the assumption on the shareholder. I am delighted that the Government now agree with us, and have deleted the relevant provisions. It is worth reflecting, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) said, that the Government, when forced to examine an argument in the House of Lords, where the arithmetic is rather different from the arithmetic in the Commons, suddenly accept it and agree to make a change. We sometimes get the feeling that because the Government are guaranteed a majority in the Commons they do not give the same consideration to the same arguments when they are advanced here. Nevertheless, we are always happy when our argument prevails.

Brian White: Does the hon. Gentleman remember that in Committee the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) was willing to accept the Opposition's

amendments but rebutted mine, which has now become Lords amendment No. 95? May I welcome the Government's conversion on electronic programme guides?

Mr. Whittingdale: It has been suggested to me that the obvious lesson to be drawn from that is that the hon. Gentleman should come and join us. If he did so, he might have more success, so I extend an invitation to him, although without great expectation of it being accepted. While we were disappointed that we were unsuccessful when these matters were first debated, nevertheless it is welcome that the Government have accepted a number of points that we made and introduced amendments that we support.

Another issue that we raised on several occasions in Committee is dealt with in Lords amendment No. 114, a sensible provision that will help to enhance transparency in the regulatory process in this area, which is a good thing. I should like to say a few words about clause 310, which is amended by Lords amendment No. 114. We have tried to convince the Government that a problem has arisen because broadcasters who are subjected to economic regulation by Ofcom through their licences for reasons other than a competition purpose, for example under various clause 3 duties, will not have a right of appeal to the Competition Appeal Tribunal. In another place, the Government have gone some way towards recognising that in practice, at least in the case of the duty to promote the interests of citizens and consumers in relevant markets, any economic regulation relating to pricing and packaging under that duty will be appealable to the Competition Appeal Tribunal. We are grateful for that welcome statement from the Government.

There are still other clause 3 duties under which economic regulation could take place for reasons other than a competition purpose. The Government have still not said that a right of appeal to the Competition Appeal Tribunal exists. The fact that they have not said so remains a source of some concern. It should be the case that any regulation of the pricing and packaging of broadcasting services—not the content of those services—under any clause 3 duty is clearly appealable to the Competition Appeal Tribunal. We will obviously want to keep a keen eye on that when Ofcom assumes responsibility for those matters, particularly the way in which it decides to proceed on economic regulation. If the Secretary of State could say anything more about that, that would be very welcome.

John Robertson: I pay tribute to the Government for agreeing to incorporate in the Bill Lords amendments Nos. 98 and 99, which reflect concerns expressed by the music industry about the impacts of consolidation in commercial radio. I hate to agree with the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) but I too believe that throughout our proceedings, Members on both sides of the House voiced their opinion and all felt that the music industry was hard done-by. However, the Government have given careful consideration to the matter and ensured that the concerns of listeners are taken into account. In short, we can retain choice and diversity on our airwaves. We should all agree that these amendments represent important safeguards for the British music industry and that our songwriters and composers have been protected in this legislation.

It is very pleasing that proposed new section 106ZA of the Broadcasting Act 1990 refers to

"Consultation about change of character of local services".

That ensures that the various stakeholders are able to contribute to the process, should they wish to do so. However, I should like to pose three specific questions to the Minister about the provision. First, I would like to clear up any greyness that may result from the change that Lords amendment No. 98 makes to clause 306, and the insertion of new section 106ZA in the Broadcasting Act by Lords amendment No. 99. Lords Amendment No. 99 specifies the grounds on which Ofcom can consent to a departure from the licence as mentioned in paragraphs (b) to (d) of subsection (1A) of section 106 of the Broadcasting Act. Can the Minister confirm that that does not narrow Ofcom's remit and obligations, and that proposed new subsection (1B) of clause 306, which states that Ofcom must have regard to the character of a service, particularly

"the selection of spoken material and music in programmes"

will still be taken into account in relation to a licensee's departures in subsection 1A, and that the music provisions are not excluded by Ofcom because of the scope of the amendments? Can the Minister confirm that that is the case?

Secondly, subsection (4) of proposed new section 106ZA specifies that Ofcom is not required to publish a notice under that section if it considers that the publication would result in a delay that would be

"likely prejudicially to affect the interests of the licence holder".

Would the Minister give some examples of considerations that would be judged to affect the interests of the licence holder in that way and would prevent the public and other stakeholders from being told of a proposed format change, let alone given the opportunity to express their response? Finally, can the Minister provide an assurance that the music industry will be consulted by Ofcom before guidance on consultation is released into the public domain? Given the high profile of issues relating to local radio services both in Parliament and beyond, I trust that the regulator will take seriously its responsibilities relating to music output on radio.

I have said on many occasions that music is the single most important influence on people's lives. People have different and diverse tastes, and I am made conscious of that every day. My researcher is always berating me because I like Eric Clapton, Huey Lewis and Garth Brooks, while I find it difficult to enjoy her taste in the Smiths and Nirvana, although we agree about REM. However, no matter what our taste, music continues to mould, simulate and entertain, which is why it is important to preserve diversity on the radio. Could the Minister put my fears to rest once and for all and tell the House that Ofcom will ensure that music on the radio will be protected?

Tessa Jowell: I thank hon. Members for their contributions about these specific and detailed changes. May I tell the hon. Member for Maldon and East

[Tessa Jowell]

Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) that he cannot have it both ways? He complained rather grudgingly that a number of amendments have been adopted, thereby improving the Bill. However, that is part of an extremely constructive parliamentary process that has extended over a fair period of time. I hope that he will see that in an area of such national importance as the shape of our media and communications industry, the Government have taken seriously the responsibility to do whatever they can to build a consensus reflecting shared views where they can be established in Parliament, and across the industry. I have said on a number of occasions that I cannot recall a piece of legislation on which there has been such wide and lengthy consultation as on the Bill. The fact that there is such a high level of agreement between the Government and the Opposition and between the House of Commons and another place is the result of that investment and that consultation, and we should be proud of it.

Michael Fabricant: No one doubts the amount of consultation that has taken place, but we find it odd that when the Opposition offered helpful suggestions to amend the Bill, they were rejected outright in Committee, yet those same amendments were accepted in another place and are being accepted today. Could not considerable time have been saved, had they only been accepted in the first place?

Tessa Jowell: Let me go back to the earlier discussion of the proposal to insert a provision to further the interests of citizens among the general duties of Ofcom. I proudly acknowledged that after listening to the debate in Standing Committee, we were persuaded that greater clarity was necessary. However, as has been made clear by the Government and by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) from his experience, inserting the word "citizen" at that stage was deemed not to be possible by parliamentary counsel. Once the matter had been voted on in another place, the more arcane conventions of parliamentary counsel allowed us to adopt the term without its previous narrow meaning relating to nationality, which had obstructed our wish earlier. That is an example of good engagement in the Standing Committee and an eventual solution being found as a result of the amendment passed in another place.

Hon. Members should remember that those outside who feed the Opposition with their briefing, ideas and proposals are free with their advice to Members in all parts of the House, so we receive the same ideas, briefing and argument. Those have been fairly reflected in the Bill as it now stands. The changes that have been made in respect of localness and local radio are a good example. The amendments under discussion were tabled in response to the radio industry's concern about the application of the "localness" clause. Hon. Members will recall that in the draft Bill, the plurality floor in relation to local radio was originally set at three plus one. In consultation with the industry, the Government accepted the case that was being made and amended that to two plus one. Let us have no more criticism. That is the process whereby good legislation is developed, and we can all take due credit.

I shall say a little more about the application of the "localness" clause. There was a concern that the Government's original proposals were over-prescriptive. In the amendments we have provided clarification, which has been welcomed by the industry. For example, the amendments make it clear that not all services need to include local material, and that a suitable proportion of local material must be locally made. The reference to a code is replaced by reference to guidance provided by Ofcom. Once again, the Government listened to the arguments from the industry and acted to reflect the balance between the ambition to deregulate where possible, and the need to protect the public interest because of the unique importance of media in our democracy.

The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford asked why we had amended the definition of control. The relevant provisions of the Enterprise Act 2002 deal with merger control, whereas the Broadcasting Act provisions safeguard plurality. There is no necessary reason why the definitions of control should be wholly identical.

The issue that the hon. Gentleman raises in amendment No. 114 with regard to broadcasting competition has been a hoary chestnut throughout the parliamentary stages of the Bill. I shall not replay the lengthy debate that took place in Committee. The issue has been debated in both the House and another place, and reflects the concerns expressed, notably by Sky in relation to the packaging of its channel. That broadcaster sought to reduce Ofcom's ability to consider the interests of citizens or consumers in respect of matters that could have an impact on its business.

Along with the important economic and competition issues, Ofcom must be able to balance the wider public and consumer issues. The need to get that balance right exercised the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee, as it has hon. Members in the House and in another place. The process has produced a Bill that represents a proper balance, and we should not re-open consideration of such fundamental questions, given the specific concerns of one broadcaster, which I have had the opportunity to discuss with that broadcaster. In view of the many procedural and other safeguards in the Bill, I believe that those concerns are unfounded.

I shall deal with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) about the importance of music, whose protection and promotion we have sought to achieve. Amendment No. 99 would mean that Ofcom did not have to consult on a request for a departure from the character of a service where the departure would not substantially alter the service's character. However, if the departure would substantially alter the character of the service, Ofcom would have to consult on the proposed departure before it could agree to it.

John Robertson: Will my right hon. Friend tell me who makes that decision?

Tessa Jowell: That decision will be made by Ofcom. In considering such matters, Ofcom must have regard to factors including the effect of the change in the selection of spoken material and music.

That is one very specific area in which the position of music is safeguarded. That has again been a matter of some considerable debate and interest during the Bill's passage. I hope that I can reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland and the House about the strength of the safeguards to secure music as part of the wide range of broadcasting genres, whether on television, on radio, and particularly where his interests lie, in relation to local radio.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 45 to 55 agreed to.

Clause 276

APPOINTED NEWS PROVIDERS FOR CHANNEL 3

Lords amendment: No. 56, in page 249, line 11, leave out paragraphs (a) and (b).

Tessa Jowell: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 57 to 68, 131, 148, 188, 190, 193, 203, 219, 263, 267 and 275.

Tessa Jowell: We have listened carefully to the arguments advanced in debates in both Houses about the subject of the Channel 3 news provider. The amendments are our response to that debate. They will lift most of the ownership restrictions on the Channel 3 nominated news provider and remove the Ofcom nomination process for that body. That will mean that ITV can own its own news provider, but must still function as a single body corporate in order to maintain the desirable level of independence.

The remaining ownership restrictions are intended to ensure that a body that could not hold the Channel 3 licence or have a substantial interest in the holder cannot provide the news service. So the main restrictions are as follows: any body banned from owning a Channel 3 licence under part II of schedule 2 of the Broadcasting Act 1990—for instance, that includes political bodies—will be similarly restricted from being or having an interest in the Channel 3 news provider; and any body, such as a major newspaper, that is prevented from owning a Channel 3 licence is also prevented from owning its news provider and restricted in the interests it can hold in the news provider.

The quality provisions remain in place and require that Channel 3 national news continues to be able to compete with other national news services. They also provide for Ofcom to approve the appointed news provider contract to ensure that it is adequately funded. In order for Ofcom to guarantee that the required arrangements are in place and work effectively, the amendments ensure that Ofcom can obtain the information it needs from ITV or the appointed news provider. If Channel 5's audience share becomes broadly equivalent to that of Channel 3, it will be possible to create a Channel 5 scheme comparable to the appointed news provider scheme for Channel 3. We will be able to modify by order the quality and ownership provisions of the Channel 3 system and any Channel 5 scheme.

I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr. Whittingdale: In debating the previous group of amendments, I suggested that we might have saved some time if the Government had listened in Committee, rather than resisted our ideas before going to the House of Lords and conceding those points. In reply, the Secretary of State said "Let's not have any more of that", but if ever there is going to be any more of that, it will be in relation to the group of amendments that we are now considering.

8.15 pm

The amendments introduce the most important change that the Opposition have managed to achieve in relation to the Bill, and it will undoubtedly benefit ITN and ITV. It is worth reflecting on the history of this matter. The nominated news provider system and the cap on ownership were established back in 1990. Such an arrangement was arguably right at that time, but over the past 14 years, it has become a handicap to ITN.

Brian White: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that the arguments for nominated news providers came from ITN itself, which advocated the system as one or two people in the company thought that they could make some fast money?

Mr. Whittingdale: The hon. Gentleman is right: the arguments came from ITN and they were put forcefully to the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, who was persuaded by them. However, the world has now moved on. ITN certainly no longer believes that that system is good for it, and neither, indeed, does the Conservative party. I suppose that we have all seen the light.

The effect of the nominated news provider system has been to reduce the revenue for ITN by a very large amount. The ITV news contract price back in 1993 was about £70 million in today's prices. Some 10 years later, the price had halved. The result is obviously that the amount of resources available to ITN has been drastically reduced, which has meant that it has not been able to invest in its business to the extent that it needs to invest in order to provide a news service that is competitive with those offered by the other major news providers. It has been suggested that Sky News was the beneficiary, as it was able to bid against ITN for the ITV contract and was likely to benefit whatever the outcome, as it could either have beaten ITN and got the contract, or not beaten it, but, in bidding, forced down the price that ITN was able to charge and weakened it as a competitor.

In our view, it is terribly important that there should be three powerful television news providers. There is no question but that the BBC has always been such a provider. Sky News has now established itself very successfully as an extremely robust and reliable news provider. While continuing to do a good job, ITN has nevertheless suffered from lack of investment caused not only by the nominated news provider system, but by the ownership cap. Currently, there are five shareholders, each of which holds a 20 per cent. stake. Two of those shareholders will be likely to wish to increase their stake, especially if they come together. Under the Government's previous proposals, however, they would have been unable to do so.

[Mr. Whittingdale]

In this House and the other place, it has been pointed out that ITV is the only broadcaster that is prevented from owning its own news provider. Indeed, it was Lord Bragg who said:

"BBC News is at the heart of the BBC and Sky News is at the heart of Sky."

He also said:

"it should be repeated in *Hansard* as often as possible"

that

"ITV is the only broadcaster prevented from owning its own news provider."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 June 2003; Vol. 648, c. 1225.]

I am happy to take up his invitation to repeat that statement once again. It is that issue that the amendments are now addressing.

It is not only the effect on the nominated news provider in terms of the necessity of cutting the price in order to beat the competition that is an issue, but the most extraordinary list of requirements regarding information that ITN has to supply to the ITC at the time of renewal. There is a list of about 40 pieces of information that the nominated news provider is required to provide to the ITC, including matters such as 24-hour capability to retrieve and transmit news and foreign external broadcasters' material not substituting for original production. It goes right into the detail of the management of the company. It is wholly unnecessary that a commercial operation should have to account to a regulator to that extent, particularly in a competitive environment. If ITN is to provide a competitive third force, it badly needs to be relieved from its current requirement and to have access to the investment that it needs.

ITN has suffered over the course of the past few years. There are many reasons for that. The uncertainty about when its nightly news bulletin is going to go out has not helped it to win an audience. Equally, the fact that the bulletin lost 10 minutes meant that it was not always able to provide as great a depth of coverage as its competitors. What ITN most needs now is long-term sustained investment. That is most likely to occur if the ownership cap is removed and if, in due course, the ITV company is able to take ITN in-house.

I welcome the fact that the Government have belatedly come round to seeing the force of those arguments, and I strongly support the amendments from the House of Lords.

Nick Harvey: I, too, welcome the amendments and the change of stance on the part of the Government. It is absolutely right that we need at least three strong news providers and that that requires ITN to be in a position to battle on equal terms with BBC News and Sky News. In recent years, the existing restrictions have handicapped ITN from fulfilling that competitive role. There are two reasons for that. First, it has suffered from a lack of investment as a result of a dispersal of shareholders, with nobody having a strategic grip on the situation or an incentive to put some serious money into it. Secondly, it has periodically to go through the auction process, whereby others can either take its service away or bid its price down; that is exactly what has happened. Although we do not know who will own ITV in future, at least if a new owner from abroad takes control of the news service he will be subject to Ofcom regulation in the course of his daily business, whereas Ofcom has no such lean upon an investor from a completely different sector.

I am pleased that the Government have shifted ground and decided to go ahead with the provision now instead of relying on a sunset clause.

Tessa Jowell: There is broad agreement that this is the right decision. I shall underline why that is. The hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) mentioned the important point—namely, that news has a special place in public service broadcasting and that it is crucially important that news services across all public service broadcasters are of high quality and adequately resourced. In that context, I stress the protection that clause 276 affords on both counts of investment and quality. There was a remarkable degree of consensus in another place. However, having had many discussions about the matter I would say that the original decisions were taken on balance rather than being conclusive in terms of retaining ownership limits.

I pay tribute to the way in which ITN conducted the argument and to Lord Bragg and Lord Alli, both of whom contributed to the debate constructively and from their own experience. We have reached the right conclusion, and I commend the amendments to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 57 to 72 and consequential amendments (a) to (e) agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 73 to 114 agreed to.

Clause 312

OFCOM'S STANDARDS CODE

Lords amendment: No. 115.

Tessa Jowell: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 116 and the motion to disagree thereto, Government amendments (a) to (e) in lieu of Lords amendments Nos. 115 and 116 and Lords amendments Nos. 117 and 118.

Tessa Jowell: With amendment No. 115, I will also speak to Government amendments (a) to (e), which are offered in lieu of Lords amendments Nos. 115 and 116, and to Lords amendments Nos. 117 and 118. It may be helpful if I indicate that I propose that the House agree with the Lords in their amendments Nos. 117 and 118.

Amendments Nos. 115 and 116 would have the effect of narrowing the scope of the code regulating broadcast advertising. At present, the ITC and Radio Authority codes can cover any matter governing standards in broadcast advertising. Those codes are developed after consultation and cover matters that are to be regulated under domestic or European law and other matters of public policy relating to broadcast advertising. The Lords amendments would limit the scope of the broadcast advertising codes to matters that may be misleading, harmful or offensive. We accept the

"misleading, harmful or offensive" formulation introduced in the Lords amendment. However, some of the matters that are regulated by way of the current codes, and which will need to continue to be regulated, appear to fall outside the scope of that amendment. We have identified two specific areas where we believe that there must be a proper basis for the inclusion of these additional matters in the code. They are the continuation of the ban on political advertising, which has widespread support in the House, and the discharge of the United Kingdom's international obligations. The Government amendments would make those matters standards objectives in their own right, regulated by the code, and include them in the aspects of clause 314 that relate to advertisement and sponsorship.

Lords amendment No. 116 would apply the standards objective for the protection of children to the provisions of clause 314 on advertisement and sponsorship. Our amendments in lieu would not overturn that, but that is an exception to our overall approach. The general framework of clause 314(1) is designed to pick out the provisions in the standards objectives that apply specifically to advertising.

Michael Fabricant: The Secretary of State mentioned the codes for children and for political advertising. However, she has not mentioned the code that controls the way in which a crime is depicted in an advert. It is part of the codes of the Radio Authority and the Independent Television Commission that the perpetrator is always caught. One can see that in such advertisements. Do the amendments mean that the codes will be outside the scope of the Bill?

8.30 pm

Tessa Jowell: Perhaps I can revert to the hon. Gentleman's point later. I shall continue to set out the case and logic for our amendments. As I said, the general framework in clause 314(1) will pick out aspects of the standards objectives that apply specifically to advertising rather than including the other standards in clause 312, which apply to other sorts of programmes as well as advertising. All the standards objectives in clause 312 apply to television, radio programmes and advertisements when they are relevant.

Let us consider amendments Nos. 117 and 118. The simpler of the two, amendment No. 118, rectifies the omission of referendum broadcasts, to which equivalent provisions to those for party political broadcasts apply. I expect cries of delight from the Opposition Benches.

Amendment No. 117 clarifies clause 314(7). It rectifies a weakness in the Bill's drafting, which has been discussed and came to light in proceedings on an appeal to the Appellate Committee. The interpretation of the provisions appeared likely to cause argument. The appeal was by the BBC against the Court of Appeal judgment that its refusal to broadcast the ProLife Alliance's party election broadcast in 2001 was unlawful. The Department was informed that an argument had been advanced that the draft Bill precluded the application of standards, especially those of taste and decency, to party political broadcasts. It was argued that a party political broadcast need not comply with the standards set by Ofcom under what is now clause 302 because clause 314(7) meant that transmission could not be prohibited on the grounds of standards. Such a change of policy was not the Government's intention and the Appellate Committee was informed of that. The amendments put the position beyond doubt: the standards objectives apply to all broadcast material.

I confirm to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) that all the objectives in clause 312(2) apply to all programmes, including advertisements.

Mr. Whittingdale: Once again, the steam has gone out of the issue and the Government have proposed an acceptable formula. As the Secretary of State knows, there was genuine concern that the word "unsuitable" was vague and capable of several different interpretations. That contrasted greatly with the existing wording in the codes of the ITC and the Radio Authority, of "misleading, harmful or offensive". It was not clear why the Government wanted to substitute "unsuitable" for the existing wording, and it caused the industry anxiety. However, after the vote in the House of Lords, the Government have tabled an amendment that is acceptable to the industry. We do not therefore wish to oppose the amendment.

On the other two amendments that the Secretary of State has tabled, I was delighted to hear that the ban on political advertising will also take into account a ban on advertising in any future referendum campaign. She was careful not to say when such a ban might have to be used, but I trust that it will not be for some considerable time. On that basis, I have no further comments.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Lords amendment No. 116 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) to (e) in lieu of Lords amendments Nos. 115 and 116 agreed to.

Lords amendments 117 to 129 agreed to.

Clause 340

MODIFICATION OF DISQUALIFICATION PROVISIONS

Lords amendment: No. 130.

Tessa Jowell: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider Government amendments (a) to (l) in lieu thereof.

Tessa Jowell: The Government are asking the House to overturn amendments made in another place to remove all restrictions on religious bodies holding broadcasting licences. We do not think that it is right to remove those restrictions in their entirety, but we have listened carefully and sympathetically to the many points raised in debates in this House and the other place. The amendments offered in lieu address many of the concerns raised by this issue.

Earlier today, I spoke to the Bishop of Manchester and outlined to him the steps that the Government intended to take, and the argument on this issue that we intended to put to the House tonight. I had met the bishop some weeks ago in his capacity as leader of a

[Tessa Jowell]

delegation of Members of the House of Lords and others who were concerned about this issue. He felt that progress had been made as a result of those discussions.

Before explaining why we think that the restrictions should be reintroduced, albeit in a modified form, I would like to emphasise that the Government are not in any sense anti-religious, or opposed to religious broadcasters or religious broadcasting. We recognise that faith communities play an integral part in the life of the UK and should be reflected in the broadcast media. We also firmly recognise that religious programming is an important element of public service broadcasting, and have amended the Bill to ensure that it can better be reflected in the Bill's definition of public service broadcasting.

Our amendments require public service broadcasters to include programmes providing history, news and information about different religions and other beliefs, as well as showing acts of worship and other ceremonies. In terms of the BBC, the 1996 agreement between the corporation and the Government identifies religious programmes as a specific strand to be provided within the corporation's television and radio services in the UK. The BBC remains committed to religious broadcasting across its services. Its statements of programme policy for the current year include an undertaking to provide 112 hours of religious programming across BBC1 and BBC2, which I welcome.

The Bill will remove all unnecessary restrictions on religious bodies holding licences. Religious bodies can already hold a wide range of licences offering significant broadcasting opportunities, including local analogue radio licences and licences for radio and TV cable and satellite services. The Bill will widen those opportunities still further, allowing religious bodies to hold licences to allow them to provide national and local digital radio services, digital terrestrial TV services and TV restricted services.

Those changes brought in by the Bill have been widely welcomed. Listening to some of the commentators, however, one could get the impression that there was a complete ban on religious broadcasters holding any licences. That is not the case. The only remaining significant restrictions on religious bodies holding broadcasting licences will relate to Channel 3 and Channel 5, national analogue radio licences and multiplex licences.

To put all that in context, under our proposals religious bodies will be unable to hold 20 licences for broadcasting programmes—the 16 ITV licences, the Channel 5 licence and the three national radio licences. They can, however, hold any of the almost 900 cable, satellite and digital broadcasting licences. As a matter of fact, religious bodies currently hold about 40 UK broadcasting licences of one sort or another.

Our policy, reflected throughout the many debates on the Bill, is to have as few restrictions as necessary. We allow religious bodies to hold different kinds of broadcasting licences where that is consistent with satisfying as many viewers and listeners as possible and giving equal respect to everyone's beliefs. We wish to avoid a situation where, through scarcity of broadcasting spectrum allocated to a particular kind of licence, some religions achieve access to the airwaves but others do not. Where there is no broadcast spectrum scarcity—such as with cable and satellite—there are no restrictions, because there are sufficient opportunities for several religions to offer services, and for other non-religious services to co-exist with them, to offer a diversity of services. It follows that restrictions could be removed in the event that significant new broadcasting spectrum became available. That would not require primary legislation, but could be done by order.

It also follows that in the event of any new classes of licence being introduced, we will carefully consider whether religious organisations should be able to hold them. There will not be a presumption that they cannot. The decision will turn, as now, on a question of broadcast spectrum scarcity. As I will explain later, we are proposing to amend the Bill to reinforce that point.

I should like to concentrate on the case for the continuing restriction on national analogue radio licences. There are at present only three national analogue licences, and there is not enough spectrum to allow more services of that kind. Given that, we believe that it would not be appropriate for one of those licences to go to a religious organisation. That is because we do not think that a religious radio service, however popular it might be with many, would have sufficient appeal to justify its having one of only three national licences. To that is added our concern that it would be invidious, and perhaps unfair, for only one religion to have a national station while the others did not.

The effect of the Bill will be to increase substantially the range of licences that religious organisations can hold. The restrictions that remain relate to areas of broadcasting where the opportunities to broadcast are limited due to scarcity of spectrum.

It has been suggested that a decision on whether to award a licence to a religious body should be left to Ofcom's discretion. I do not agree. One of the aims of the present, limited disqualification is that scarce spectrum should be used to satisfy as many viewers and listeners as possible. Although I wish neither to denigrate the religious stations that exist nor to deny that they do a good job on their own terms and have a very loyal listenership, all the evidence is that such services do not have mass appeal.

8.45 pm

Mr. Lansley: Is the Secretary of State not perpetuating the myth that the decision on whether the owner of a given licence, or a media asset associated with a licence, is a religious body or person automatically presupposes that the owner would wish to broadcast religious programmes to a greater extent and in a particular form? In other contexts, the Secretary of State and her colleagues have argued repeatedly that the licence conditions in the Bill prevent such a distortion of the purposes of a given channel. Why does it suddenly become possible in the case of a religious owner?

Tessa Jowell: That is an interesting question, but I think it must be a working assumption that a religious organisation seeking to acquire a broadcasting licence does so for a reason connected with the expression of a faith, although that might not occupy 24 hours of a day

or, at any rate, all the broadcasting time available. Surely it is fair to assume that a religious organisation would wish to express its faith, and the character of that faith, through the broadcasting that it chose to schedule.

Mr. Lansley: My point does not relate to whether the Secretary of State's assumption is fair. We could debate that at length. My point is that she and her colleagues have argued that, notwithstanding the assumption, the protections in the Bill relating to licence conditions would be sufficient to prevent such an eventuality in any case. Why does she need to perpetuate discrimination in the structure of ownership to protect the format of a given licence, when those other protections can be applied?

Tessa Jowell: We apply the same logic—the same argument—to political organisations. In their case there is an outright ban, as opposed to the heavily qualified restriction that we propose in relation to religious organisations. Members should recognise the progress that has been made in opening access to religious organisations during the Bill's progress.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Tessa Jowell: I want to make some progress.

The case for restriction is especially relevant in the case of national analogue radio licences. In their case, Ofcom's discretion is limited as such licences are normally awarded to the highest bidder unless exceptional circumstances apply.

Given the evidence of the limited appeal of religious stations, we do not think it would be right to allow a well-financed religious organisation to buy one of only three national analogue licences and run it as a subsidised minority-interest service when the primary purpose of the broadcasting legislation is to ensure that services are calculated to appeal to a wide variety of tastes and interests; but without a ban, that could happen. A well-funded religious organisation could outbid all other organisations, including other religious organisations, to broadcast religious material.

The rationale for the bidding system for national licences is that it enables the market to deliver a popular and sustainable service. The highest bid is thus a proxy for wide appeal. But the system will not work if people act in a way that is not market-oriented. A well-funded religious body could run its national service on a non-commercial basis through subsidy and subscriptions.

Andrew Selous: I apologise to the House for not being in the Chamber for the earlier part of the debate.

I am interested in the Secretary of State's argument, as it is my understanding that no other professional broadcasters have actually been refused access to a licence for reasons of spectrum scarcity. I return to the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). Can the Secretary of State enlighten the House as to why religious bodies are put into a separate category and treated as no other country treats them?

Tessa Jowell: The hon. Gentleman is right. The argument for limiting access to religious organisations relates to spectrum scarcity. It follows from that—as indeed one would assume—that if no restriction were to exist, it is perfectly possible that a wide range of religious organisations would want to apply for licences. It then follows that it would not be fair, given the small number of licences to which we are referring, not to offer fair competition to the wide range of religious organisations that might want to bid for those licences. Certainly until analogue switch-off, the argument turns on that precise point about spectrum scarcity and applies specifically to the services that I identified.

Mr. Lansley: In the terms of the Secretary of State's argument, if, under the provisions of the Bill relating to spectrum trading, a religious body were to try to acquire enough spectrum to make it available for broadcast purposes—for example, for a further analogue sound broadcast licence—would the Secretary of State have any objection to a religious body offering a fourth such licence by using its own spectrum?

Tessa Jowell: Were those circumstances to arise, the decision would be for Ofcom, not for the Secretary of State.

To continue my argument, the system that I was outlining would not necessarily produce a popular service; indeed, the need to rely on subsidies rather than on advertising suggests the opposite. It is hard to see what other sorts of body would adopt a similar approach. Conventionally, commercial bidders for such a licence will naturally aim to provide a popular service with wide appeal so as to ensure a financially viable business.

The need to treat all religions fairly and to use scarce spectrum in a way designed to appeal to a wide range of tastes and interests, combined with the particular way in which national analogue radio licences are awarded, convinces us that retaining a ban on religious bodies holding such licences is essential.

It is frequently alleged that our policy is not compatible with the European convention on human rights. We have taken legal advice, however, and are convinced that the remaining restrictions are fully compatible with our commitments under the European convention on human rights. The Joint Committee on Human Rights believes that the restrictions are likely to be compatible. The European Court of Human Rights has declared inadmissible the most recent challenges to our restrictions. It is important to make clear a point that was raised in the earlier stages of the Bill: we are aware of no current challenges in Strasbourg to the status of religious broadcasting under the European convention on human rights.

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way a second time. I should like to return briefly to her argument about spectrum scarcity. I am puzzled as to why no other Government in the world are arguing in the way that she is about spectrum scarcity. France and the Netherlands have just released a raft of new analogue frequencies. On her point about licences being divisive and unfair to religious broadcasters, religious broadcasters tell me that they only want to be

[Andrew Selous]

treated in the same way as any other organisation and to have exactly the same criteria for fit and proper persons applied to them. Surely that is not too much to ask.

Tessa Jowell: The hon. Gentleman asks about spectrum availability. Regardless of the circumstances in relation to the disposal of spectrum in other countries, only enough broadcast spectrum is available in the United Kingdom for three national analogue licences. I reiterate something that I hope that I have already made clear to the House: if things were to change, we would review the situation.

On the question, asked by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), about how a religious organisation might procure spectrum, perhaps a better answer than the one that I gave earlier is that such things could be considered if they were to arise and would be subject to the Secretary of State's order-making powers.

I hope—I have no great certainty—that I have persuaded hon. Members on both sides of the House that the ongoing restrictions are made necessary by reason of spectrum scarcity. I should like to take this opportunity to comment on the words used in the communications White Paper. In explaining the reasons for placing restrictions on religious broadcasting, we referred to religious broadcasting's "particular capacity to offend". That was an unfortunate and unnecessary phrase, and I am quite sure that we would not use the same words if we were publishing the White Paper today.

The Government amendments will reverse what might described as the default position in the case of religious bodies. At present, religious bodies are disqualified persons for all licences, but, at Ofcom's discretion, they can hold certain licences listed in the legislation. The Bill, as passed by the House in March, would have retained an approach by which, if a new category of licence had been introduced, religious bodies would have been disqualified automatically. The Government amendments make it clear that religious bodies will be disqualified only in relation to licences specified in the Bill. They are now ruled in until ruled out, rather than the other way around. The issue has caused concern in the religious community, and I believe that that modest change will be welcomed.

We have already recognised in the communications White Paper that the restriction on religious bodies holding local digital sound programme service licences is an anomaly. We recognise that the restrictions that we propose to lift may be causing commercial difficulties for some religious broadcasters. Therefore, subject to the Bill being passed with the continuing modified restrictions, we also propose to implement those parts of the Bill that remove restrictions on religious broadcasters two months after Royal Assent.

Subject to the will of Parliament, it is still our intention to implement all other ownership changes in December, so I hope that religious broadcasters will not have to wait any longer than necessary before they can take up new broadcasting opportunities. Government amendments (h) to (k) are also necessary to achieve that, as they allow the ITC and the Radio Authority to stand in Ofcom's shoes for those purposes until Ofcom acquires its substantive licensing functions at the end of this year.

The Bill will usher in a new era for religious broadcasters, with greatly increased access to broadcasting licences. If the Bill is agreed, the restrictions on local and national digital radio programme licences should be lifted by the middle of September. Once that happens, new opportunities will open up. For example, local digital radio multiplexes are still being licensed, so religious broadcasters can seek to obtain some of those new slots. In the case of existing radio multiplexes, there should still be chances for religious bodies to get slots on those multiplexes that are currently unfilled or become vacant in the future. There are also opportunities, as I have already mentioned, to take up radio slots on Freeview.

9 pm

We are confident that Ofcom will take its duties with regard to religious broadcasting seriously and, mindful of its role in maintaining and strengthening public service television broadcasting, will not be content to see religious broadcasting relegated to inaccessible parts of the television schedule. Broadcasters who want to make a significant change to current levels of output, as set out in their statements of programme policy, are required to consult with Ofcom before they can do so.

We remain convinced that, for the present, the case for some restrictions remains. But where restrictions can be removed, they have been removed. The Bill offers enormous possibilities for religious broadcasters that I hope they will seize.

Finally, I have told the Bishop of Manchester that I would like to convene a forum for a discussion with religious broadcasters of how they see the future of religious broadcasting developing. That will provide an opportunity for those with an interest to have a continuing dialogue with the Government. We will arrange that later this year. I have dealt with this matter at some length and in some detail, because of the sensitivity of the issues and the concerns that have been expressed, and I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Whittingdale: It is a matter for genuine disappointment that at the end of the nine-month consideration of the Bill and all the amendments on the Order Paper today we are left with this one, on which we still have no meeting of minds. We continue to believe that the disqualification of religious bodies from holding any form of broadcasting licence causes great offence to those communities and is unnecessary under present law.

The Secretary of State is right to say that considerable progress has been made. Some 13 years ago, religious organisations were not able to hold any licences at all. Since then, exemptions have been granted for satellite radio and local analogue radio licences. The Bill represents further progress in allowing religious organisations to apply for more kinds of licence. Now, in the amendment that the Government have tabled tonight, they have changed what the Secretary of State described as the default position, so that instead of the Bill specifying what kinds of licences religious organisations can apply for, it will specifically identify the licences for which they cannot apply. To that extent, the Government's amendment is welcome, as is the relaxation that the Bill already contains. However, it still does not go far enough.

The Secretary of State mentioned that she had had a conversation with the Bishop of Manchester in which she had set out the proposals that she was making tonight and he had said that he welcomed them as progress. We see them as progress, but I do not believe that the Bishop of Manchester no longer wishes to see the disqualifications removed from the statute book. I think that he also still believes that there are concerns about the human rights aspect, and he recognises that it will not go anything like far enough to satisfy a large number of people in the industry. To that extent, the Bishop of Manchester should perhaps have another opportunity to express his view in person when the amendment returns to the other place.

As I said, progress has been made, but the Secretary of State fails to grasp the point, as the Government have repeatedly failed to do ever since this matter was first raised, that the concern is not how many licences or what kind of licences religious organisations should be allowed to apply for or be disqualified from applying for. It is the fact that religious organisations are singled out in statute as somehow inappropriate to apply for particular kinds of licences—that somehow they are so unacceptable that they need to be named in the Bill as not able even to apply for those licences. There is almost certainly no religious organisation that has any great interest in applying for any of the categories of licence that the Bill sets out. In promoting the amendment, we do not intend to say that ITV should be bought by a religious organisation or that a national radio analogue licence should be bought by a religious organisation. All that we, and the religious organisations, are saying, and have been saying ever since this matter first arose, was that they should at least be allowed to put in an application, and that that should be judged according to the usual procedure.

In defending the Government's position, the Secretary of State referred, as the Government have done several times in the past, to the argument about spectrum scarcity. It is by no means accepted by a large number of people that there really is the spectrum scarcity that she claims that there is and that would justify the Government's position. A former Minister in her Department, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher)—I am sorry that he is not here, but I do not think that he will mind me quoting him—said:

"As Minister with responsibility for broadcasting, I was not satisfied with my officials' changing answers when I investigated the Christian broadcasters' disqualification. I believed in their democratic freedom to broadcast to the third of a million people who wrote and petitioned the Department, asking to be allowed to listen. The consumer need could easily have been met, if officials had allowed the Christian music broadcasters to use the additional national radio frequency from the Isle of Man."

He finished:

"It was never a technical matter when I was Minister. I don't believe it is a matter of spectrum now. I believed then, and I believe now, that religious broadcasters should bid for national and local licences on a level playing field with other applicants".

As I said, I do not think that he will mind me quoting him, as he is also a co-signatory to the early-day motion that I tabled, which has been signed by 68 Members from all parts of the House, calling on the Government not to reverse this Lords amendment.

Real problems have been caused already. Liberty AM women's radio, which is owned by religious people, was disqualified, because of that, from applying for a digital audio broadcasting licence. Unlike the other local radio licences, it was not given an opportunity to have an automatic roll-over of its analogue licence, which, I understand, cost the station some £4 million. In addition, Premier Christian radio, which is now the only remaining religious radio station in London, faces a new hurdle with the potential switch to digital radio mondiale. That matter has been raised with the Department in the past, and the Government have been asked whether Premier will be able to continue broadcasting on a DRM multiplex, with perhaps a variety of different stations, or whether it will be a casualty of this provision. The Government have still not replied on that, and we need to have the answer.

The Government have also said, as the Secretary of State has repeated tonight, that they do not believe that there are problems in relation to the European convention on human rights. She said that the Government have taken legal advice, and that they are now advised that the provision is not incompatible with the convention. Whether or not that is the legal advice, will the Secretary of State read carefully a speech made by Lord Brennan in the other place? He is a distinguished lawyer and he set out clearly real concerns about whether the provisions are compatible with human rights legislation.

Lord Brennan said:

"The Bill seeks, among its objectives, to make provision for the regulation of . . . broadcasting. Such a statutory objective is of democratic import; therefore, if we find in its terms a provision that a significant proportion of society shall not be allowed even to apply for a radio/TV licence, nationally as well as locally, our democratic antennae should very carefully be switched on to find out why."

I shall not read the whole of his speech, although I recommend it to anyone who is interested in the subject, but he continued:

"The result . . . is that the argument that there is no available frequency is simply unacceptable. It begins to concern me democratically. The Human Rights Committee of the House has asked the Government for a reasoned explanation, so the Government must give an answer. I have not seen one . . . The first step in the argument is the democratic right; the second is why the Government are justified in restricting it . . . These proposals do not come before the Committee on behalf of religiously inclined citizens of this country, but from me as a democrat. I do not understand why those who would wish to tune into religious broadcasting in this country should find themselves in the same legislative slot as politicians or advertising agencies."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 5 June 2003; Vol. 648, c. 1497–98.]

Despite the Government's assurance that the provision might not technically be incompatible with current human rights legislation, some of our finest human rights lawyers are raising real concerns that human rights would be damaged in this country and that there is no real justification for that to happen. We have argued that existing restrictions on the allocation of licences that are available to the authorities already provide sufficient protection. Even if that were not the case before, the Government today introduced a new provision in the form of the plurality or public interest test. I said that I was not a wild enthusiast of the public interest test but it specifically provides that if the Secretary of State decides that it would not be in the public interest to award or transfer a licence, she will be allowed to raise questions. A raft of safeguards now exists to prevent undesirable people from acquiring

[Mr. Whittingdale]

licences. That is why we continue to be unconvinced that there is any necessity for religious organisations to be singled out in such a way in the Bill.

The matter is causing great concern in the House of Lords, where the Lords amendment was supported in all parts, and hon. Members of this House from all parties are also worried. Even now, I ask the Government to consider the matter again and accept Lords amendment No. 130 rather than insisting on the Government amendments.

Nick Harvey: I echo the disappointment of the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) that at the end of our long and tortuous process and after there have been sensible compromises and progress toward a consensus on so many issues, the Government have not met their opponents halfway on this matter. They continue to want to include a blatantly discriminatory measure in primary legislation to provide who can and cannot hold broadcasting licences on the basis of who those people are. No account is taken of what they would want to do with the licence or their programme format or content or market ploy. The Government simply want to use primary legislation to ban people on the basis of who they are. That is fundamentally wrong. Despite the Secretary of State's confident assurances about the human rights implications, I am convinced that that will catch up with them in the fullness of time and they will be found to be wrong. It is not possible to begin to justify the proposal in fundamental principle.

9.15 pm

As hon. Members said, the Government proposal is not necessary. We have equipped Ofcom with a raft of tools that it can use to regulate the media, any number of which would be applicable. It has close powers over the format of radio stations and their programming. If they get into a realm that is faintly political—I questioned witnesses on this when they came before the Pre-legislative Scrutiny Committee—they are subject to the same rules on impartiality and balance as others in the media. The addition of the plurality test gives Ofcom a serious way of dealing with spectrum scarcity.

The Government have grappled with the absurd principle that the licences should be granted to the highest bidder. If they want to find a way out of the conundrum they should re-examine that idea. It is far fetched to maintain that British society, culture or democracy is under threat from people who want to play Christian music on the radio. I do not understand the Government's concern about that.

David Burnside (South Antrim): In the part of the UK that I come from, religion is, perhaps, slightly higher up the list of topics for discussion, both historically and at present, than it is in other parts of the UK. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is no support from any part of the political spectrum in my area for discrimination against the religious sector's ability to have total access to broadcasting under the right regulatory framework? Does that not say something to the rest of the UK?

Nick Harvey: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman says. If the idea does not raise hackles in his community in Northern Ireland, that gives the lie to the view that the matter is of great concern to all.

It is a human rights issue. I am told that the religious freedom rapporteur of the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Abdelfattah Amor, has decided to investigate religious disqualification in UK broadcasting law. That does not surprise me. One would expect that because it is so very wrong in basic principle. As hon. Members said, no other country is resorting to such crude methods to control who broadcasts.

We should remember that we are talking about religious persons as well as religious bodies. For example, the formula adopted by the Government will disqualify Olave Snelling, a broadcaster and former trustee with London Premier radio in the independent sector, from applying in consortium with others for national analogue TV or radio licence, yet she previously produced BBC national religious radio and TV programmes, for which she received licence fee-payers' money. We clearly thought that that was in the public good. If she wants to produce similar programmes for a similar audience, she will be banned from doing so and cast into darkness as an unfit person.

The Government have to go further. Re-imposing the disqualification will drive yet more of our UK religious broadcast companies into the hands of European partners and some of those will start to use serious financial muscle to challenge the disqualification in the courts. I believe that the Government's case will eventually come apart. I do not know what consideration they have given to the impact of that or what it will cost.

Mr. Timms: I have been listening to the hon. Gentleman's argument with interest. Does he accept that the central concern of the effective and well supported campaign on the issue has been that religiously owned radio stations should have access to digital national licences, which the Bill allows? The central concern has not been analogue licences.

Nick Harvey: I hear the Minister's point. Among those who campaigned on the issues, different people will have had different concerns—depending on whether one talked to a bishop or to a more commercially mobilised operator. My concern is that it is fundamentally wrong to ban in primary legislation particular people or organisations from being allowed even to apply for a broadcast licence. We have regulators who are perfectly capable of sorting the wheat from the chaff and of deciding what constitutes a balanced programme for the public within a scarce spectrum. The Government are simply wrong and will have to go back to the drawing board.

Mr. Lansley: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) on this matter, but I should like to reinforce one or two points.

The exchange with the Secretary of State on the availability of spectrum under spectrum trading adequately demonstrated that, although the Government contend that the argument is about scarce spectrum, it is not. They cannot offer an answer when tested on their proposition in the light of additional spectrum becoming available. They are proposing a ban that will apply regardless of the amount of additional spectrum that is made available, even though Ministers could then make an order to modify such change.

When the Secretary of State compared the proposed ban with one on political organisations, she demonstrated that the argument is not about spectrum scarcity. The Government say not that they are stopping political organisations owning such licences because of the scarcity of spectrum, but that—they said this to the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee—political organisations should continue to be banned from holding licences because they are not satisfied that such organisations or those holding office in them would be able to operate with the necessary impartiality. Nobody is disputing that point; we are disputing that that proposition should not apply to religious bodies.

The hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) got to the point of the matter. One can well understand how granting one political party access to licences would be seen as undermining other political organisations that are directly in competition with it. Indeed, the entire population would probably regard such a move as unhealthy for our democracy. I do not find people from religious bodies saying, "If church X has access to a licence, church Y will be unhappy about it." I do not find people contending that religious organisations and persons—we must keep remembering this—holding office in them are somehow in competition with one another for a limited amount of spectrum, the purpose of which is to proselytise and evangelise.

The religious context is unlike politics and the other contexts in which we have imposed bans because there are people who live their lives in a religious context. It is not right for us to discriminate against those who participate in religious bodies as office holders and want also to be active broadcasters, perhaps owning licences. I do not want us either to discriminate against those who live their lives in a religious context and want broadcast organisations that reflect their lives and provide them with a service.

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman would agree with me that there is deep unease among many constituents and many Members on this issue? Is it not another example of the Government's control freakery and their need to be able control everything in sight?

Mr. Lansley: The hon. Gentleman is making his own point about the Government. He has his own experience of the Government, which no doubt justifies his remarks. I shall not make such a crude political remark at the end of a stimulating and consensual debate in almost every other respect. However, the hon. Gentleman is right about the degree of concern. For reasons that are becoming increasingly difficult to discern, the Government are persisting in a blatant piece of legislative discrimination. We have reached the point where we cannot find any realistic prospect of religious organisations coming forward to apply for licences, as my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford said.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that perhaps the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) was getting to the heart of the matter when he referred to the highest bidder? Is it a question of the Government choosing mammon rather than God?

Mr. Lansley: I hope that that would not be the case.

I do not think that the Government were getting anywhere near the heart of the matter when it came to the issue of the highest bidder. When these licences are to be provided, there is a backstop power so that the licences cannot necessarily be exercised in ways that would be contrary to the intentions that lie behind the legislation.

That is the curiosity. We do not have practical examples of what would contravene the Government's intentions. The Government talk about having to define licences that cannot be obtained, but at the same time leave in amendment (f), which is proposed in lieu of the Lords amendment, a mechanism that would require Ofcom to make determinations before people are able to apply for and exercise other licences. This strand of discrimination is still running right through the structure of the proposed legislation.

It seems that within that structure, if the Government have realistic concerns about the nature of the way in which the licences would be held and used by religious bodies or persons associated with those bodies, Ofcom has the powers to deal with that situation. At the point of acquisition or of merger, if a large organisation is involved, the media merger rules and the media plurality test could bite. They could bite on anybody who was likely to prejudice the achievement of the standards objective that is set out in clause 312. If that objective was not contravened or if the licence was not of sufficient size to justify such a test, the fact of the licence itself and Ofcom's control over it mean that anyone who owns such a licence would not be able to use it in ways that would be prejudicial to the public interest. I find it difficult to understand why this discrimination is persisting. In these circumstances I would prefer that we accepted, with the Lords, that the discrimination should be done away with rather than sending anything back in lieu.

Andrew Selous: I shall support briefly the comments of every Member who has spoken so far in the debate.

The restrictions that are still left in the Bill cause practical problems. One example is Premier Christian Radio, which wants to have a digital radio multiplex licence. Without that it will have difficulties in developing its service in future. If the Secretary of State genuinely believes that all the religious broadcasters are happy with the concessions offered in the Bill, why does she think that they have lobbied the House and the other place so hard, and right up until today? Why does she think that they are so concerned about the issue?

I received about 50 letters from my constituents last week on the matter. Constituents telephoned me and e-mailed me, and it is clear that they are extremely

[Andrew Selous]

concerned. I wonder what consultation the right hon. Lady has undertaken. The message that I pick up from my constituents is one of great concern. It has even been put to me that those religious broadcasters who will continue to suffer discrimination will, if necessary, move to France to rebroadcast to this country. That is because of the restrictions that are still set out in the Bill. That is a ridiculous situation and, like other hon. Members, I urge the Secretary of State to reconsider the matter.

9.30 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I speak as an honorary associate of the National Secular Society. I came to our debate uncertain about what I would do if there was a vote, because there are concerns out there about giving more freedom to religious organisations to apply for licences. However, I have been persuaded by my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) and the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) that the right thing to do is oppose the Government in a Division, as it is not necessary to include such a provision in primary legislation, given that there are safeguards on content, which is what we should be talking about—it is about content, not ownership. I am happy to put that on the record because previously I have abstained on a vote on a ten-minute Bill on the subject and even voted against such a proposal.

I should like to make another point about discrimination, which has been raised by all Members, but especially the hon. Members for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) and for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). It is reasonable that they should make such arguments on behalf of religious organisations, but may I gently stress to them that it works both ways? In public service broadcasting, where there is provision for religious broadcasting on the basis of both religion and belief, it should not be right that, as a quid pro quo for non-discrimination, people with atheistic, agnostic or purely secular beliefs should be excluded from participating in, for example, reserved slots such as "Thought for the Day", which is not described as religious broadcasting.

I urge hon. Members on both sides of the House to reflect on that. I cannot go into it in any more detail, as it is not the subject of the amendments. When discrimination is cited, one must consider whether religious organisations or the law around religion seeks to discriminate against those without religion.

Andrew Selous: My understanding is that "Thought for the Day" is in fact a religious slot, and that all faiths have the opportunity to use it. Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that there are many other opportunities during the day for secular organisations to make their case?

Dr. Harris: I do not want to go too far down that path, but humanism and atheism are a belief pattern. Indeed, an earlier Government amendment expands religion to include both religion and belief, thus including people who do not have a theistic faith but have atheistic beliefs. It is reasonable that there should not be exclusivity and discrimination in any of those areas. Indeed, that can be seen in programmes that fall outside the category of so-called religious slots. One cannot turn on the radio without hearing bishops and clerics arguing with one another about various important issues of the day. I do not want to overstress that point, but would like gently to urge hon. Members to consider the point that, in their effort to avoid being discriminated against, religious organisations should look carefully at themselves and the surrounding legislation to see whether they discriminate against people without religion.

Tessa Jowell: Hon. Members have made wide-ranging points with considerable passion, and I respect entirely the sincerity and strength of feeling that the debate has engendered.

I should like to respond to some of the specific points that have been made, starting with the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) about DRM, a digital system that is currently being developed for use on AM frequencies. There is a worry that DRM may be licensed as a multiplex, and consequently religious bodies would be prevented from holding such licences under the proposed restrictions. The first point to make is that no decisions have been taken about the way in which DRM will be licensed. It may be licensable under existing legislation, or it may require new legislation. Whatever happens, I can categorically assure the House that the restrictions on such licences will be looked at again.

The second set of arguments refer to discrimination and the charge made by the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) that no other country is arguing the position that our Government have adopted. It is important to remember that the position varies from country to country, depending on spectrum availability. Many countries are in a different position from ours, because of the widespread availability of cable networks there. The charge that the Government have not met their critics halfway is not true.

I underline that by reminding the House that under our proposals, religious bodies would be excluded from holding 20 licences for broadcasting programmes—that is, 16 ITV licences, the Channel 5 licence and the three national radio licences. However, they could hold any one of almost 900 cable, satellite and digital broadcasting licences. Despite that availability, which has come about as a result of the change in rules, religious bodies still hold only about 40 UK broadcasting licences.

Having listened carefully to the arguments, I find that they are rather overblown and disregard the concessions that have been made. They do not fully take account of the central point: we are speaking of disqualification from holding broadcasting licences on analogue. There are no restrictions—I repeat—there are no restrictions on religious groups holding broadcasting licences on digital. It is important that hon. Members who expressed their concerns take that point on board and understand it. The restriction arises because of the present scarcity of analogue spectrum capacity.

The Government's proposal is not a discriminatory move. It is driven solely by spectrum scarcity. Content regulation, another means to which several hon.

Members referred, has a role to play but it is not the whole story. We are dealing only with national analogue radio licences and television licences, as I identified, in areas where there is spectrum scarcity. There is no discrimination in respect of the 900 possible licences that religious bodies can hold, the 20 that they cannot bid for or the 40 that they already hold. It is important that those in all parts of the House who continue to voice concerns and whose constituents continue to make representations take that point on board.

In the course of debate and discussion over the past nine months—almost a year—progress has been made, and more digital spectrum has become available. The restrictions have therefore been lifted on holding licences on digital spectrum. The restriction is specific and is not intended to discriminate in any way against religious groups. It is intended to protect for the widest possible appeal the limited availability of analogue spectrum.

The hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) referred to the attitude of religious groups in Northern Ireland. Many of the groups responding to the Government's consultation supported a ban. Notwithstanding what hon. Members have said about the representations that they have received, many of the groups that responded supported a ban, including the Church of Ireland.

We have had a long debate this afternoon and this evening. In the view of hon. Members on both sides of the House, we have established in it a remarkable degree of consensus across a wide range of issues relating to media ownership and broadcasting, as well as broadband and spectrum management. Those issues have been controversial, but the process of debate and parliamentary scrutiny has achieved a remarkable degree of agreement.

The matter before us remains the final sticking point. I say this to hon. Members on both sides of the House: listen to the argument, set aside the claims about discrimination on religious grounds and accept the evidence in fact that the restrictions that we intend to maintain in the Bill are required by the present scarcity of analogue spectrum. If that situation changes, as with the availability of digital spectrum, we will obviously review and reassess the case. As of now, however, the Government's view is that that spectrum should be safeguarded for licences that will attract widespread appeal. Nobody has claimed that religious broadcasting attracts anything like a majority audience, and licences should be retained for services that will command a widespread and majority appeal. We should maintain the current restriction on their availability to religious organisations for the reasons that have been put before us. The dialogue with religious organisations about religious broadcasting and such issues more generally, as the availability of spectrum changes in future, will continue.

This has been a hotly contested issue. I believe that the Government's position is right. It is a considered position and it represents deregulation and the unpicking of rules that the previous Conservative Government put in place. I commend the proposals to the House.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Speaker: I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the Aye Lobby. Here is the Whip now, so the Serjeant need not bother. We are all right.

The House having divided: Ayes 314, Noes 175.

Division No. 290] **[9:43 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David

Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Heppell and Paul Clark

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy

Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Francois and Hugh Robertson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will have noticed that that Division took 17 minutes. I have no difficulty with that, but I hope that it sets a precedent. Although the Government delayed the House on this occasion, I hope that you will not hold it against the Opposition if, occasionally, our Divisions take 17 minutes due to the important discussions that we like to have with colleagues in the Lobby. I hope also that you can assure me of your even-handedness in these matters and that we have entered a new era of Divisions.

Mr. Speaker: About a fortnight ago, the right hon. Gentleman reminded me that I worked in a Rolls-Royce engineering factory. Time and motion used to work to stopwatches. I did not like it, so I do not work to a stopwatch.

It being after Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Government amendments (a) to (l) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 130 agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 131 to 278 agreed to [one with Special Entry].

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

IMMIGRATION

That the draft Immigration (Provision of Physical Data) Regulations 2003, which were laid before this House on 12th June, be approved.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

OFFICIAL SECRETS

That the draft Official Secrets Act 1989 (Prescription) (Amendment) Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 19th June, be approved.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Question agreed to.

IMMIGRATION

That the draft Asylum (Designated States) (No. 2) Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 17th June, be approved.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Mr. Speaker: I think the Ayes have it.

Hon. Members: No.

Division deferred till Wednesday 16 July, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002].

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews for Partners) Regulations 2003, which were laid before this House on 25th June, be approved.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Mr. Speaker: I think the Ayes have it.

Hon. Members: No.

Division deferred till Wednesday 16 July, pursuant to Orders [June 28 2001 and 29 October 2002].

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I shall put together motions 7 to 10.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Representation of the People (Form of Canvass) (England and Wales) Regulations 2003, which were laid before this House on 9th June, be approved.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Representation of the People (Form of Canvass) (Scotland) Regulations 2003, which were laid before this House on 9th June, be approved.

[Mr. Speaker]

Constitutional Law

That the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc.) (No. 2) Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 24th June, be approved.

Insolvency

That the draft Insolvency Act 1986 (Amendment) (Administrative Receivership and Urban Regeneration etc.) Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 12th June, be approved.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Question agreed to.

European community Documents

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9)(European Standing Committees).

Draft Budget and Annual Policy Strategy

That this House takes note of the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum from HM Treasury dated 5th June relating to the Preliminary Draft General Budget of the European Communities for the financial year 2004, and European Union Document No. 7229/03, Commission Communication on the Annual Policy Strategy for 2004; and supports the Government's efforts to maintain budget discipline in the Community.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9)(European Standing Committees).

Identification of Ovine and Caprine Animals (Sheep And Goats)

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 15829/02, draft Council Regulation establishing a system for the identification and registration of ovine and caprine animals and amending Regulation (EEC) No. 3508/92; and supports the Government's view that this proposal does not take account of the way in which the United Kingdom sheep and goat industry operates, nor of the enhanced system of identification and traceability already in place in the UK, which is sufficient for animal health disease control purposes until an economical and affordable electronic identification system is available.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Question agreed to.

Sittings of the House

Motion made,

That—

(1) at the sittings on Wednesday 16th and Thursday 17th July, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any Message from the Lords has been received and any Committee to draw up Reasons which has been appointed at that sitting has reported; and

(2) at the sitting on Thursday 17th July, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until he has reported the Royal Assent to any Act agreed upon by both Houses.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Machinery of Government Changes: Amendments to Standing Orders

Motion made,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 94 (Scottish Grand Committees (questions for oral answer)) be amended in line 2 by leaving out the second 'Scottish' and inserting 'Scotland';

(2) Standing Order No. 103 (Welsh Grand Committees (questions for oral answer)) be amended in line 2 by leaving out the second 'Welsh' and inserting 'Wales';

(3) Standing Order No. 119 (European Standing Committees) be amended in the table in paragraph (6), as follows:

(a) in line 5, by leaving out 'Transport, Local Government and the Regions' and inserting 'Transport; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister';

(b) in line 12, by leaving out 'Lord Chancellor's Department' and inserting 'Department for Constitutional Affairs (excluding those responsibilities of the Scotland and Wales Offices which fall to European Standing Committee A)';

(4) Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended in the Table in paragraph (2), as follows:

(a) before item 1 insert

'1 Constitutional Affairs	Department for Constitutional affairs (including the work of staff provided for the administrative work of courts and tribunals, but excluding consideration of individual cases and appointments, and excluding the work of the Scotland and Wales Offices and of the Advocate General for Scotland) 11';

(b) leave out the item relating to the Lord Chancellor's Department inserted on 27th January;

(c) in item 16, leave out 'Welsh Office (Office of the Secretary of State for Wales (including relations with the National Assembly for Wales))' and insert 'Wales Office (including relations with the National Assembly for Wales)'; and

(5) the Order of 5th November 2001 relating to Liaison Committee (Membership) be amended, in paragraph (2), by leaving out 'Lord Chancellor's Department' and inserting 'Constitutional Affairs'.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Business of the House

Motion made,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 17th July, the Motion for the Adjournment of the House in the name of the Prime Minister relating to matters to be considered before the forthcoming adjournment may be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours, and shall then lapse if not previously disposed of.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Home Affairs

Ordered,

That Mr Chris Mullin, Bridget Prentice and Mr Tom Watson be discharged from the Committee and that Mr John Denham, Janet Anderson and Mrs Claire Curtis-Thomas be added.—*[Mr. McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

WELSH AFFAIRS

Motion made,

That Mr Bill Wiggin be discharged from the Committee and that Mr Nigel Evans be added.—*[Mr. McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

INFORMATION

Ordered,

That Michael Fabricant be discharged from the Committee and that Mr Michael Jack be added.—*[Mr. McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

PETITION

Bamburac Family

10.6 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend): I wish to present a petition on behalf of the friends and supporters of the Bamburac family. It asks the House to ask the Home Secretary to allow the family to stay in Britain, and not to deport them to Croatia. Mr. Bamburac is of Serbian ancestry.

The petition has attracted 1,411 signatures in just over a week. Most of the petitioners are my constituents—friends and neighbours of the Bamburac family. That is clear evidence that the family have settled into the life of our community in Newcastle. They have lived in Newcastle for the past five years; their daughter Sabrina is now 10, and has learnt English with an endearing Geordie accent, made friends, and settled into school. It is Sabrina who makes this case so special. She is an unusually gifted tennis player, with a talent acknowledged in public, nationally, by the Lawn Tennis Association. Her human rights, enabling her to develop that talent in the country that she has made her home, would be cruelly infringed if the family were deported.

To lie upon the Table.

Prison Medical Services

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

10.8 pm

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): I am grateful to have this opportunity to raise issues about prison medical services, although I very much regret the circumstances that gave rise to this debate as I had hoped that the issues could be resolved in correspondence with the Home Office and the prison medical service. However, my constituent, Mr. John Tero, whose case I want to raise, is very seriously ill from the cancer that first developed and was untreated while he was in Woodhill prison. An ombudsman's inquiry takes time and, as my constituent says, time is not on his side. In fact, only this evening, he came out of hospital after another acute spell of illness.

I have some general questions about the working of the prison medical service but, more important, I want two specific things for Mr. Tero. The first is the payment of the £45 compensation that he was promised, and the second is an apology for the way in which he has been treated. I emphasise that Mr. Tero is innocent. He was convicted at the end of 2000, but at his appeal in December 2001, the conviction was found to be unsafe and the charges against him were dismissed. By then, however, it was too late for him.

Before Mr. Tero went into Woodhill, he developed a problem with his prostate gland and arrangements had been made for him to have an operation, which was duly carried out in May. He was discharged from hospital after three days and returned to Woodhill where he was put into an ordinary cell. He was then put into the medical wing for a couple of hours, but later—he estimates that it was about 11.30 at night—he was returned to the ordinary cell where he remained, despite suffering a severe haemorrhage some days later. He was given no help to clear that up, nor was he taken to the medical wing.

I am astonished at the way that my constituent was treated. Is it standard practice for prisoners who are discharged from hospital after surgery to be returned to an ordinary cell? In the interests of the Prison Service, I would have thought that prisoners in such circumstances would be kept under some degree of medical observation and I consider that what happened to him was excessively cruel.

It was after that, however, that Mr. Tero's problems really developed. He complained to the prison medical staff that he could not keep food down; he could not swallow and he could not eat. He was given indigestion tablets. He complained several times, but got nothing more than indigestion tablets.

Mr. Tero started to lose weight. He showed me the belt that he had worn in prison and I could see the notches where he had had to tighten the belt to stop his trousers from falling down during the months when he became more ill and steadily lost more weight. In late October, he was transferred to Wymott prison although he said that he felt too ill to be moved. At that stage, he could eat only soup and biscuits. He said that the staff at Wymott treated him better. He continued to complain that he was unable to eat, and was eventually—I believe on 12 December—admitted to Preston hospital for a day for tests, which found he had a tumour on the gullet.

[Ms Sally Keeble]

In December when Mr. Tero's appeal came up in London, he was too ill to attend. He was released from prison shortly afterwards on 19 December.

On 9 January 2002, he was admitted to Northampton general hospital and was found to be suffering from cancer. He underwent radiotherapy and, several months later, surgery. However, this year the cancer came back, and he is now very seriously ill.

I have spoken to Mr. Tero's consultant who said that the particular cancer from which he suffered was a fast developing one, and early intervention was essential. He also said that the early warning of Mr. Tero's difficulty in swallowing should have alerted medical staff to the possibility of a serious problem.

Mr. Tero first came to me for help last November; he had a strong sense of injustice, and simply wanted an apology. However, what has happened since then has made things worse for him, not better. Over the past few months, we have been in correspondence with the Home Office, the Prison Service, the prison health policy unit and the Prison Service ombudsman, but we have not got much further.

First, there was a dispute about the clothes that Mr. Tero wore to hospital when he had his prostate operation. He said that they had been lost. The Home Office, in a letter from the predecessor of my hon. Friend the Minister, denied that. When Mr. Tero produced the copy of his lost property form, the Home Office conceded the point and agreed to pay him £45 compensation. Five months later, the compensation has still not been paid.

More important, there have been different stories about Mr. Tero's care and they raise more questions than they answer. Mr. Tero says that he complained of being sick, of not being able to eat, of not being able to swallow, and of losing weight. Indeed, he weighed only 66 kg when he arrived back in Northampton. The Prison Service said, through a letter from my hon. Friend's predecessor, that Mr. Tero's weight was stable. A second letter from the Prison Service stated that he had actually put on weight and weighed 77.8 kg on 4 October. How exactly did his weight go down from 77.8 kg on 4 October to 66 kg on 9 January?

It is claimed that Mr. Tero's only complaint was one of gastric reflux, despite the fact he made seven visits, as recorded by the Prison Service, to the doctor at Woodhill between 5 June and 4 October. There is no recognition by the prison medical service that he was unable to eat. Mr. Tero told me he had pretty much stopped eating completely by about August or September and that he ate only soup and biscuits when he was transferred. He also said that a prison officer at Wymott tried to get him special food that he could eat.

The Prison Service says that health care staff at Wymott were unaware that Mr. Tero no longer wished to attend his appeal, whereas my constituent said that he spoke to prison staff, that he had collapsed at least once by that stage and that the prison officer that he consulted agreed that he could not travel and sorted out some of the appeal arrangements for him.

In trying to pursue this matter, there has also been some dispute about whether the Prison Service ombudsman can deal with it, or whether it is down to the prison health care policy unit. In the middle of all that, there is a desperately ill man who has a complaint—in my view, wholly justified—about the way in which he was treated. I have to say that, apart from my concerns about his treatment, the difficulty that I have had in getting a resolution also raises real concerns about the way that the prison medical services work. I therefore want to ask a number of questions not just about my constituent, but about the general policy.

First, on the general policy, about which I have asked questions previously, what are the procedures for prisoners who have been discharged from hospital? Should they be kept in a prison medical facility, or just put in an ordinary cell? What are the procedures for examining prisoners and recording their complaints? In particular, if they complain of eating difficulties, are they weighed or is their eating monitored in any way? Given that prisoners sometimes go on hunger strike, I should have thought that procedures would be in place to deal with those issues.

How long does a prisoner's consultation last with a prison doctor? What notes are kept of those consultations? What access do prisoners have to their medical files? What liaison takes place between the prison's medical staff and the rest of the prison staff? It appears, from what Mr. Tero said, that some of the prison staff were aware of his condition and tried to help him, but that did not seem to have been relayed back to the medical staff. For example, I understand that Mr. Tero collapsed on at least one occasion and that he was unable to get up on at least one occasion. On several occasions, other inmates did some of his tasks for him; he was simply unable to do them because of his poor state.

Would not it be normal in any institution for such events to have been noted and passed to the medical staff to deal with? Why are there no clear lines of accountability, so that the prison medical services can be properly held to account, instead of inquiries being batted between the prison ombudsman and the health care policy unit, as well as the Home Office and the Prison Service?

Secondly and most importantly, on behalf of my constituent, I want an apology. What has shocked me most in all this is that my constituent has had no apology and no recognition of the hardship that he has experienced. Having dealt with him for a number of months, I know that his hardship has been immense. I have watched while his health has declined and he has been completely unsupported and not helped by the Prison Service. By any account, he had a horrendous time and regained his liberty only to lose his health. Of course, it will always be debatable whether proper and timely intervention could have made a difference to the ultimate medical outcome, but he could at least have been spared the indignity and suffering that he has had to endure.

Public services must ensure that they respect people's humanity and, whether they are prison services or whatever, ensure that they treat people with the dignity that is their due. I cannot for the life of me understand how anyone could look at the bare facts of the case and fail to realise that they were dealing with a vulnerable, very sick, elderly and innocent man and that steps had to be taken to make amends.

What my constituent most wants is an apology, which will make a big difference to him in the time that he has left and end his burning sense of injustice about the way he was treated. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will ensure that the £45 compensation that is outstanding—it is not very much—is paid very promptly, acknowledge that Mr. Tero was not properly treated and offer the apology that my constituent deserves.

10.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) on her success in obtaining this debate. She set out eloquently and powerfully the complaints made by her constituent, Mr. John Tero, about his medical treatment while he was in prison in 2001. He believes that the Prison Service failed to give him proper access to adequate health care and treatment, despite his making repeated complaints about the symptoms, including substantial weight loss, of what turned out to be a serious medical condition. We are, of course, all deeply concerned to hear about his current state of health.

In my reply, I intend to refer to the wider context of health care in prisons, and the general improvements that are taking place under the partnership established in April 2000 between the national health service and the Prison Service. However, I shall begin by responding to the specific points that my hon. Friend made on her constituent's behalf. I know that she will understand if I do not go into the same detail as was possible in the exchange of private correspondence that she has already had with my predecessor and the director general of the Prison Service. Medical confidentiality limits the amount I can divulge in public. I will try to deal with as many of the points that my hon. Friend made as possible, but I will in any event write to her to give a full answer to every question that she has asked me this evening.

Mr. Tero was first received into Woodhill prison on 15 December 2000. He told staff that he had recently seen his GP about a medical problem and he subsequently underwent successful surgery for that problem in May 2001. On his return from surgery on 4 June, he had a full medical examination. He did not at that time report any significant symptoms. He did, however, report symptoms of a different condition on 16 July 2001 when he was seen by a prison doctor. The doctor prescribed medication.

My hon. Friend asked whether it is standard practice for a prisoner to be returned to his cell after surgery. That is a clinical decision in each case. Normally, prisoners are returned to the health care centre on their immediate return from hospital. Health care centres have cells, of course, and I do not know whether it was one of the cells in the medical centre to which Mr. Tero was returned. That is one of the points that I will clarify in the letter I send to my hon. Friend.

Later in July he was seen again. Similar symptoms had persisted and further medication was prescribed. He was seen again in August and September, and at a further appointment with a doctor on 4 October his weight was recorded. It had remained stable since the beginning of June. On 9 October 2001, Mr. Tero was transferred to Wymott prison. On reception his continuing health problem was again identified and recorded. On 15 October, he consulted a doctor at Wymott with further symptoms. In view of that development, he was referred to a local NHS hospital for specialist investigation. The first appointment made for him was for 20 November but unfortunately it was cancelled at short notice. A new one was arranged for 12 December.

The investigation revealed a significant condition that merited further attention. The hospital made an appointment for 19 December. As my hon. Friend said, by coincidence that was the same day as Mr. Tero won his appeal and was released from Wymott. Prison staff advised him of the importance of keeping the hospital appointment but he preferred—perhaps understandably—to return home to Northampton and consult his own GP. Staff at Wymott informed the hospital about what had happened and subsequently forwarded details from the hospital to the GP.

My hon. Friend and her constituent are clearly dissatisfied with the responses that they have received to date from the Home Office and the Prison Service. I know that, in addition to bringing this matter to the attention of the House in this debate, my hon. Friend has referred the matter to the prisons and probation ombudsman. Although the clinical aspects of the complaint fall outside his jurisdiction, he has—I understand—agreed to examine the alleged administrative failings in the case. In addition to any other material that has been provided to the ombudsman, I shall ensure that he receives a full copy of the *Official Report* for this debate, so that all the information that my hon. Friend has provided tonight may be fully considered.

Ms Keeble: I wrote to the ombudsman for the second time on 27 May, and I have not had a reply yet. Is my hon. Friend saying that he has now agreed to take on the case, as he had not done so previously?

Paul Goggins: It is my understanding that the ombudsman has accepted the case, but I undertake to confirm that and to ensure that there is proper communication from the ombudsman to my hon. Friend, as that is the least that should happen in terms of indicating to her whether the case is to be considered. I assure her that I will look closely at the ombudsman's findings and take any remedial action that may be called for in the light of his conclusions.

My hon. Friend raised two specific questions. One was in relation to the payment of compensation, which she says is owing. I have in front of me a copy of a letter that she received from my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Hilary Benn) dated 11 February 2003, which refers specifically to an agreement that Mr. Tero would be offered £45 in compensation. I cannot understand why that payment has not been made in the months since, and I intend to follow it up as a matter of urgency, to make sure that all the problems are ironed out and that the payment is properly made.

Ms Keeble: As of today, that money had not been paid to my constituent, and he is very ill.

Paul Goggins: I assure my hon. Friend that I will follow the matter up first thing in the morning and ensure that any payment that is outstanding is made. I understand the circumstances in which that would happen.

My hon. Friend's second question was whether I would offer an apology to her constituent. Given my undertaking that I will follow up the inquiry with the ombudsman, I need to look at his findings before I make any firm commitment in that area. I also confirm tonight that I have decided to ask the director of prison health to arrange for an independent clinical review of this case and to report the outcome directly to me. I hope that my hon. Friend will therefore be reassured to some extent that I want to deal with this case in as open and honest a manner as possible.

Ms Keeble: I understand that there are always cautions about making an apology, but does my hon. Friend accept that this matter is now six months on? If an ombudsman's inquiry would have sufficed, I would have left it at that. It seems, however, that at the very least my constituent has been given some very shoddy treatment, and it is fair that he should receive recognition of the fact that he has been badly treated—frankly, I would not treat a dog like that. That should be recognised and he should be given some form of apology for the suffering and hardship that he has experienced, which has been needless.

Paul Goggins: Rightly, my hon. Friend argues forcefully and powerfully again on behalf of her constituent. There is at least a possibility in relation to some of the assertions that have been made that that information would not be shared by the Prison Service or the medical staff within it. It is my responsibility as a Minister to weigh all the facts and to make a proper judgment in the light of all that as to whether an apology is owed. I will be the first to offer that apology if I judge that it is merited. I promise my hon. Friend that I will follow this issue through as swiftly as I can.

As I said at the outset, this debate takes place within the context of a major reform in the delivery of health services for prisoners that began in 2000 and has already led to significant improvements as services become mainstreamed within the national health service. With the exception of acute care, prison health services used to operate more or less independently of the NHS. This led to deep concern about growing isolation and the emergence of significant differences in the standards of health care afforded to prisoners compared with those enjoyed by the general public. In response to those concerns, the Government established a formal partnership between the Prison Service and the NHS in April 2000. Two new joint Home Office and Department of Health units—a prison health policy unit and a prison health care taskforce—were appointed to lead and manage a programme that was designed to modernise prison health services, increase NHS engagement with the prison population and introduce much improved performance monitoring arrangements. The organisational changes were accompanied by new investment to tackle substance misuse, mental health problems and communicable diseases.

The Prison Service has committed more than £60 million to improve health care centres and services in the three years since the new approach was adopted. All prisons now have health needs assessment and improvement plans. They provide an important focus for prisons and their local health partners when planning and managing change and improving services. Increasingly, the plans are being incorporated in the local health economy, thus giving a clear signal that in future there will be full integration with local NHS planning.

A prison health work force strategy has been developed to broaden the base from which prison health workers are drawn, improve access to training and promote professional development, which was recommended by the report of the working group on doctors working in prisons and an earlier report on prison nursing. The appointment of a head of health care training at the Prison Service training college has also enabled robust and targeted training for health care workers to be developed.

Occupational standards have been introduced that reflect good NHS practice and provide the basis for an NVQ in custodial health care. Work is under way to ensure that prison-based health care staff have access to the same training opportunities as their NHS colleagues and that work force development confederations include prison staff in their planning and development activities.

Many of the worst examples of unsuitable and inflexible health facilities are being replaced or improved as part of a four-year capital investment programme that is worth more than £70 million. New purpose-designed health care centres are being built at Birmingham, Pentonville, Chelmsford, Hull and Feltham, where the quality of the existing health care facilities had frustrated modernisation and the introduction of much needed improvements to the quality of care for prisoners. Eight further substantial improvement schemes are planned for Liverpool, Norwich, Cardiff, Durham, Holloway, Parkhurst, Brixton and Dartmoor prisons. Improving arrangements for information sharing between the Prison Service and the NHS will help to improve the continuity of care for people as they pass between the community and prison.

Our plan for improving primary care in prisons is designed to increase integration with primary care planning through local primary care trusts. The publication of "Developing and Modernising Primary Care in Prisons" in June 2002 provided a framework for the development of primary care in prisons and practical advice on how change could be achieved.

The extent of mental ill health in the prison population is a particular cause of concern. In December 2001, we published a strategy for modernising mental health services in prisons that outlined how the provision of prison mental health care is expected to develop during the next three to five years. The plan included the development of day care provision and—building on the commitments in the NHS plan—of mental health in-reach services for prisoners with severe and enduring mental illness.

The plan stated that, by 2004, the 5,000 or so prisoners who will have a severe mental illness at any one time should receive more comprehensive mental health services in prison. All prisoners with severe mental illness will receive treatment and no prisoner with a serious mental illness will leave prison without a

proper care plan or a care co-ordinator. In the new partnership between the NHS and prisons, some 300 additional staff will be employed to help to achieve this objective.

Research indicates that current reception screening processes fail to identify up to three quarters of those prisoners who have a severe mental illness. To rectify that, new triage-based reception screening arrangements were developed and piloted at 10 local prisons during 2001–02. They focused on identifying and managing prisoners' immediate and significant health needs on their first reception into prison. The work is closely linked to the development of the Prison Service's suicide prevention strategy. I am pleased to say that the evaluation of the pilot sites shows a substantial improvement to the identification of prisoners with a severe mental illness. The introduction of the system to all local prisons is being phased in over a 12-month period from April 2003.

Prisoners often have to wait too long to obtain both emergency and routine dental care. Fewer than 20 per cent. of prisons are currently meeting NHS waiting times for access to routine and emergency dental services. The recently published "Strategy for Modernising Dental Services for Prisoners in England" sets out how we intend to develop and modernise the provision of dental services within prisons. A three-year investment plan has been put in place to support its implementation, which will enable regional prison health development teams to ensure the implementation of dental service action plans for those prisons currently not meeting access targets.

A new standard for clinical services for substance misusers was issued in December 2000. It is consistent with current Department of Health guidelines and forms the basis for ensuring that substance misuse services are available in all local prisons and remand centres to a level of quality that is at least comparable to those in the general community.

Every prison is now expected to have in place a range of measures aimed at reducing the risk to prisoners, their families and the wider community of the transmission of blood-borne viruses. For example, all prisoners should be offered immunisation against hepatitis B on reception in order to increase protection for individuals, reduce the risk of outbreaks of infection in prisons and increase protection for the wider community following a prisoner's release. All NHS organisations now have in place a system of clinical governance. Clinical governance must also become the framework within which health care in prisons is delivered.

On 1 April 2003, financial responsibility for prison health was transferred from the Home Office to the Department of Health in England and the Welsh Assembly. Funding transfers of £117.7 million for England and £2.2 million for Wales took place on that date. That was a logical development of the partnership between the Prison Service and the NHS and will ensure that prisoners can access the same range and quality of health services as the general public.

A development network of prisons and primary care trusts has been established to provide a test-bed for that transfer at operational level and is likely to lead to some PCTs assuming effective commissioning responsibility for prison health services in their localities from April 2004. By April 2006, responsibility for commissioning prison health services in England will be fully devolved to NHS PCTs, thus effectively mainstreaming that activity within the NHS.

The Government have made new money available to support that development. The Department of Health will be making available significant additional resources for prison health in England worth an extra £46 million a year by 2005–06. That is more than a third more than the Prison Service spent last year on health services. It will be targeted on areas of real need, including mental health, drugs and infectious diseases. I assure my hon. Friend and the House that the programme of modernisation and reform of prison health care is very much on track.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 15 July 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HEREFORD MARKETS BILL *[Lords]*
Read a Second time, and committed.

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL *(By Order)*
Order for further consideration, as amended, read.
To be further considered on Tuesday 9 September.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Airport Expansion

1. **Mrs. Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham): What recent representations he has received about airport expansion. [125434]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): The national consultation ended on 30 June. We estimate that at least 300,000 responses have been received from across the UK. We are analysing all these and, as I have said, we will set out our decisions in the air transport White Paper later this year.

Mrs. Gillan: Does the Secretary of State recall that when the Government granted permission for terminal 5, they said that they would strictly limit the growth of aircraft movements, which so badly affect my constituents in Chesham and Amersham? Do the announcement of the widening of the M25 and yesterday's announcement of permission for Crossrail to go ahead with consultation on the Heathrow route imply tacit approval for a third runway at Heathrow—and does that not make a mockery of the assurances that the Government gave my constituents?

Mr. Darling: No, I do not think that it does. The Crossrail proposal, to which we shall return if we reach Question 6, has merit in its own right. It will provide links between east and west London, including Heathrow. If it gets the final go-ahead, it will bring the advantage of removing traffic from the roads because more people will be able to go to Heathrow by rail. I should have thought that that would be thoroughly good for everyone who lives in west London. The hon. Lady will be aware that when my predecessor gave terminal 5 the go-ahead, he made it clear that he was aware that the Government were about to consult on the future capacity requirements of airports, including Heathrow, so I do not accept the premise of her question at all.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): When my right hon. Friend has a look at the 300,000 responses, will he bear in mind the fact that air transport in the UK alone benefits from some £7.5 billion of tax concessions each year? Will he consider the fact that if the concessions were phased out, that would reduce some of the pressure for airport expansion and provide additional financial resources for transport, of which I am sure he would make good use?

Mr. Darling: As for the 300,000 responses, the House might be interested to know that half of them came from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): It has a bigger membership than the Labour and Tory parties put together.

Mr. Darling: As my hon. Friend says, the RSPB enjoys a very high membership that must be the envy of all political parties—although I doubt whether we are likely to emulate that membership just yet.

The Government have always made it clear that the aviation industry should be responsible for meeting its costs. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) will also be aware that the reason why air fares have reduced so dramatically is not so much because of taxation but because the no-frills carriers—the low-cost airlines—have stripped out much of the costs of selling their tickets. My hon. Friend might also be interested to know that unsurprisingly, people in London have the greatest propensity to fly, but those in Scotland are the second most likely to fly.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), replied at column 24W of yesterday's *Hansard* that the total cost of the consultation was £4.2 million? Will he explain why he has set a 30-year frame for airport consultation but only a 10-year transport plan for road and rail? Does he accept that he got his sums wrong on at least one aspect: the road and rail links to Stansted airport?

Mr. Darling: Let me try to answer the hon. Lady and find out whether I understand her correctly. Naturally, the consultation documents on air travel that we have published examine the situation over a 20 to 30-year time horizon because of the time that would be taken to plan and build extra capacity. It is sensible to consider such things over a long period. The 10-year plan is essentially related to the Government's spending programme, and the hon. Lady will recall that annual programmes existed in the days of the Conservative Government. All spending Departments now have their spending fixed three years ahead so that they have

greater certainty, which allows for better planning. However, we have fixed transport spending on a 10-year time horizon. Fixing the spending of any Department on a 30-year time horizon would be problematic, because the figures would become less reliable as one went further on in time. I say in the nicest possible way to the hon. Lady that she is not comparing like with like.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the strong case for expanding London Luton airport. He will also be aware that with very modest investment, passenger throughput could be quadrupled from 7 million to 28 million, and with a little more investment, it could be expanded to more than 60 million passengers a year. Will he consider giving Luton an early go-ahead before the more difficult options elsewhere are considered?

Mr. Darling: I am well aware of the arguments that my hon. Friend, and my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran), have advanced on Luton airport. However, I have made it clear many times that I intend to make the decisions and the announcement on air travel at the same time, at the end of the year. No announcements will be made in advance in respect of a particular proposal or airport.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Perhaps I can return to the subject of birds. Given that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has given a licence to BAA to cull Canada geese in the vicinity of Heathrow, within, I think, a 15 km or perhaps a 15 mile radius, what representations has the Department had on bird strike at Heathrow, bearing in mind that a few years ago a flock of Canada geese hit a Boeing jet?

Mr. Darling: I am aware of the fact that some years ago a Boeing 767 hit 20 or 30 Canada geese. The Department, the Civil Aviation Authority and the airport operators keep bird strike under close review. They are aware of the issues and receive a number of representations. Unfortunately, bird strike is a feature of most airports, for obvious reasons. The key is to manage the problem as best we can by controlling the number of birds around an airport. Most people would agree, however, that the matter is under control at British airports.

Rail Franchises

2. **Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): If he will make a statement on the extent to which (a) performance and (b) customers' complaints will be a material consideration when future rail franchises are awarded. [125435]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): The Strategic Rail Authority must ensure that bids for franchises are evaluated on an objective and fair basis, and that the market is open to new entrants. The criteria therefore focus on compliance with the SRA's specification, bidders' ability to deliver and value for money. Improving performance is, of course, a fundamental objective for all franchises.

Andrew Mackinlay: I thank the Minister for that response. However, passengers are frustrated by the lack of a mechanism for their complaints to be heard, evaluated and determined in a consistent way. One of their complaints is often that they do not know how to complain. Complaints relate not merely to reliability, but to the inability to purchase a ticket, cleanliness, access to loos and so on. All franchises have the implied term or condition that there will be good services and a response to complaints, but people are frustrated. There is no passenger power, and there should be. I invite my right hon. Friend to address that matter, so that the SRA has to take into consideration the failure of train operators to respond reasonably to complaints and representations by the paying passengers. It is time he protected the passenger.

Mr. Darling: At the moment there does not appear to be any difficulty with people making complaints, since there are rather more of them than one would like.

Andrew Mackinlay: But they are not recorded.

Mr. Darling: Complaints are received and recorded, not only from individuals but from the rail passenger councils that have been set up across the country. It is more productive, however, to address the fundamental problems that give rise to complaints. The first thing is to improve reliability, and the second is to do what the SRA is doing—to change the franchising policy so that, in future, issues such as reliability and cleanliness are essential parts of holding a franchise. If train companies do not meet their obligations they can be taken off the track altogether, which did not happen in the system that we inherited.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Given that my constituents' trains are more crowded and less punctual than they were when the right hon. Gentleman started in government six years ago, and as he keeps going on about the year of delivery, can he give me an idea when the year of delivery might be?

Mr. Darling: Train services in the south-east and other parts of the country are slowly seeing reliability increase. Let me give the hon. Gentleman an example of one of the difficulties that we face. The Government of whom he was a member failed to make provision to upgrade and replace the power supply for trains running south of the River Thames. It is all very well for Conservative Members to say that trains ought to be better and more reliable, but we are making up for 18 years in which the Tory Government did not put enough money into trains.

The hon. Gentleman is right to express concern that the improvement is not as fast as it should be, but we are upgrading the power supply to get greater reliability of trains and replacing 40 per cent. of the rolling stock, nearly half of it on the London commuter services, which should improve reliability and quality of journey. The Conservatives neglected that, and did nothing about it in their rush to privatise the railways, with all the consequences that the hon. Gentleman's constituents and ours have to put up with.

Mr. Graham Stringer (Manchester, Blackley): Is my right hon. Friend as concerned as I am about the fact that as Network Rail lets shorter and shorter franchises,

it is taking more revenue risk than originally envisaged when the railways were privatised, the banks are learning that lesson, which is likely to make it more difficult to finance major infrastructure, both heavy rail and light schemes? What will he do about that?

Mr. Darling: Of course, it is the SRA that lets the franchises. It is right to move to a system that has far greater specification of the requirements of reliability, cleanliness, safety, and so on. One disadvantage of the longer-term, 15-year franchises was that towards the end of them the figures were unrealistic and more and more train companies said that they could not deliver. That does not make any sense. My hon. Friend has a point, in that the costs of some railway projects and light rail schemes—there is an example in Manchester—appear to be going up, up and away in an unjustified way. That is partly to do with the attitude of those in the private sector who are financing the projects. I am extremely concerned about that because we cannot allow industry to come to believe that if it names a price, we will simply pay it. That is not the case. Despite what has been said in the House, certainly from the Opposition Benches, private investment in the railways continues to be substantial, and it is one reason why we are able to invest so much in total, which will improve the railways.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Further to the reply that the Secretary of State has just given, he will know that the SRA has just renewed the South West Trains franchise, but only for three years. In conjunction with the SRA, will he consider longer franchises, because the longer the franchise the greater the incentive for the train operator to invest in rolling stock, stations, car parks and other improvements?

Mr. Darling: Of course, the right hon. Gentleman was around at the time when the railways were privatised. The idea then was that if a franchise were awarded for 15 or 20 years, train companies would come up with investment and eventually start paying money back into public funds, but that did not happen. Far too many train companies took the profits in the first two or three years and then came back to us and said, "Sorry, we can't deliver on our side of the bargain." We are moving to a far better system, whereby franchises will be let for seven years and will be renewable, but what companies are meant to produce in the way of reliability, comfort, safety and so on will be strictly specified.

On the right hon. Gentleman's specific point, the South West Trains franchise was continued for the next three years to allow for the introduction of new rolling stock to replace the mark 1 slam-door trains. After that, the franchise will be put out to tender in the proper way under the new system. I say to the right hon. Gentleman, and to all Opposition Members who still believe that privatisation will somehow make an improvement, that, as with so many things that the Conservative party did, the promises were never delivered.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is that not precisely why the Secretary of State should encourage the Strategic Rail Authority to chop off a few heads in the train operating companies? Frankly, passengers are getting sick to the back teeth of companies that could not run a jumble sale. Unless we make it very clear that the taxpayer will not go on funding incompetence as a career in very poor companies, everyone will suffer.

Mr. Darling: I have some sympathy with what my hon. Friend says. Indeed, the SRA made it clear last month in the case of Connex that it was not willing to carry on putting money into a company when it was not satisfied that there were adequate financial controls. That is a clear lesson to railway operators that high standards are rightly demanded, that the public expect them, and that the train companies must deliver. As I said earlier, the SRA will have the power under the new franchising system to get somebody off the tracks much more quickly and effectively if they do not deliver. That will make for a far better service.

Utilities (Public Highways)

3. **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham): If he will introduce legislation to provide for an improved system for utility companies to give notice to local authorities of works on the public highway. [125436]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Tony McNulty): Since April 2001, highway authorities in England can charge utilities up to £2,000 a day every time any of their works overrun an agreed deadline. The National Assembly for Wales has that power but, I believe, has not utilised it yet. We are also operating pilot schemes in Camden and Middlesbrough to test powers to charge utilities from the start of each work. Once parliamentary time permits, we intend to introduce a Bill containing measures to allow more effective management of utilities' works, to ensure that disruption is kept to a minimum and end the nonsense of roads being dug up time and time again, with all the commensurate congestion.

Ian Lucas: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply, and am glad that legislation is on the horizon. In particular, will he ensure that the legislation includes strict compensation provisions so that businesses that are strongly and adversely affected when due notice is not given by utilities are given appropriate compensation? That will enable constituents such as Mr. and Mrs. Ruscoe of Tan-y-Dre in my constituency to receive proper recompense for the great damage that has been done to their business over far too long a period.

Mr. McNulty: On balance, we decided to do things the other way round, and make sure that important measures are in place to deal with notice and tighten the existing legislative framework for utility works to reduce the disruptive effect on businesses such as the one cited by my hon. Friend, thus obviating the need for compensation. We do not believe that including rigid requirements on the payment of compensation in legislation is the best way forward. If we get the overall regime in place and working, that will obviate the need for compensation.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Can the Minister tell the House whether there has been any early

feedback from the pilot schemes in Camden and Middlesbrough, and whether such an approach will improve the position, particularly in town centres, where work by utilities is inadequately communicated to commercial frontages, and the extent of closures in their part of the town is often not well understood? Will that position improve if the pilot scheme is extended?

Mr. McNulty: The impact of constant roadworks is well known and deleterious for businesses that just want to go about their business. The Camden and Middlesbrough schemes have not been up and running for terribly long, and we are still awaiting feedback from them. When there is a full review of the pilots we will feed the results into legislation, and, I hope, resolve the problem throughout the country, including Leicestershire.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): According to what published criteria, and under whose auspices, is it determined that in certain cases such works shall take place at night?

Mr. McNulty: Invariably, that is done in co-operation with the relevant highways authority.

Hydrogen Fuel

4. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): What progress has been made in the past three months with his work on hydrogen fuel-based transport. [125437]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): The energy White Paper set out the steps that the Government are taking to explore the possible use of hydrogen in transport, industry and elsewhere. As part of this, we have begun a detailed assessment of the implications of transport hydrogen for our wider energy and transport policies.

Mr. Dalyell: What is the case for co-operating with the billion-dollar American project on hydrogen in Idaho?

Mr. Jamieson: I am aware of my hon. Friend's enormous interest in these issues. We are aware of the research in the United States, and we are in dialogue with the Americans to make possible partnerships on hydrogen work. I think my hon. Friend would agree that international work on a matter of global significance is important. The United States is looking in particular at producing electricity from nuclear sources to produce hydrogen, but we may decide on a different approach. Nevertheless, the Government are addressing seriously the future prospects for hydrogen.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): The Minister will know that Department of Health statistics show that nearly 400 Londoners a year die from transport-related pollution. As hydrogen is much cleaner than petrol—it produces no CO_2 emissions—will he give increased impetus to research on hydrogen, as London seems to be well behind many other capital cities in Europe in advancing its use?

Mr. Jamieson: The level of air pollution in many of our cities, particularly London, has improved vastly over the past 10 or 20 years, although that does not mean that the situation is ideal. We see hydrogen as the medium to long-term solution to the problem of pollution in our cities, but we must solve the problem of how the hydrogen is produced. It must be produced from electricity that is sustainable and does not produce CO_2 and other emissions. In the meantime we have a complex programme to introduce cleaner vehicles and cleaner fuels, and to improve engine technology, including the catalysts. We are working closely with our colleagues in the European Union to address some of those issues. I am glad to say that improvements are being made, but the Government share the hon. Gentleman's impatience for us to move rapidly on these important matters.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that the integrated gasification plant being built in my constituency by Coalpower is capable not only of producing electricity without any toxic emission, but of capturing enough hydrogen to power the local bus fleet? Does he agree that the development of hydrogen power is so crucial to the future of the environment that the Government should play a major role in developing that technology?

Mr. Jamieson: I am aware of the scheme to which my hon. Friend refers. It demonstrates why we are looking across a wide range of projects to get cleaner fuels. We do not think that there is one solution. There may be many and varied solutions and various technologies may be used, but in the meantime we will examine the fuel duty on hydrogen, and may give that encouragement. My hon. Friend is rubbing his fingers together as though money might be available, but that would be from a different Department, not mine. There are many other measures that we are introducing on vehicle excise duty, company car tax and, as I mentioned a moment ago, cleaner engines. I will consider the issue that my hon. Friend raises to see whether there is any way that we can further progress it. I am grateful to him for bringing it to the attention of the House.

M6 (Traffic Congestion)

5. **Tony Wright** (Cannock Chase): What assessment he has made of the extent to which the rail system can relieve traffic congestion on the M6 in the west midlands. [125438]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Dr. Kim Howells): Work by the Strategic Rail Authority shows that the £9 billion west coast main line upgrade will lead to transfers of both passengers and freight from road to rail and help to relieve congestion along the whole route from London to Glasgow, including the M6 in the west midlands.

Tony Wright: My hon. Friend knows that for large parts of the day, the M6 in the west midlands does not

move at all. That is partly because of the local traffic that uses the motorway. If we are to get that traffic off the motorway and on to rail, we need a good local rail service, yet the Chase line which serves my constituency cannot afford to invest in more trains or longer platforms, so we have an overcrowded, unreliable service that drives people on to the roads and clogs up the M6. Does that not cry out for a bit of joined-up thinking?

Dr. Howells: I acknowledge the problems that my hon. Friend has just listed, but there is a great deal of joined-up thinking on the matter. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has just announced a billion-pound programme for the west midlands. We are looking for ideas from local authorities, and we are looking at their local transport plans. I am sure my hon. Friend knows that Birmingham Moor Street station is being extensively refurbished, the Kidderminster and Stourbridge service via Snow Hill has increased, and the cross-city line is providing a turn-up-and-go passenger service on the west midlands city line. There is a great deal of work going on and I am confident that it will address some of the problems. I hope that my hon. Friend is under no illusion that the vast amount of traffic currently on the M6 will all be relieved by improvements to the rail service. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced last December, and more recently, a programme of road widening on some parts of the motorway system, including the M6. We are also considering traffic management measures for the M42, some of which are quite revolutionary in concept.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): The Minister is right to say that the upgrade of the west coast main line will assist, but does he agree that if we are going to get more people out of their cars on the M6 and on to the railways, we must improve reliability? Is it not appalling that in the past 12 months, delays on our railways have been caused not only by the wrong type of snow and the wrong type of leaves, but by the right types of leaves in the wrong season, and that the latest cause of delay is the current fine weather, as it is too hot? Is he not embarrassed to preside over a railway system that is more sensitive to the weather than English cricket is?

Dr. Howells: I have not been embarrassed since I saw England thrashed by Wales three times in a row.

On my way to London on First Great Western yesterday, I was informed that we should be watching out, as the current extreme temperature means that the rails might expand and signalling could start tripping off, which would cause big problems. The work that we are doing, and the money that we are putting into railways, are intended precisely to address such situations. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not trying to suggest that some of the delays are somehow avoidable. He knows full well that they are not avoidable, and that it is sometimes necessary to blockade lines in order to carry out the essential maintenance and refurbishment that are needed if we are to improve the railways in the long run. I am sure that he agrees that a lot of work is involved because there have been decades of under-investment in our railways, in which such maintenance was not carried out.

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale) *rose--*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that the question was about the M6. I say to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) that when he seeks to come in on a question, his remarks should relate to that question. He asked about railways, but he should not have done so, and this will be the last time he gets away with it.

Mr. Hall: My hon. Friend will be aware that since privatisation, Virgin Trains no longer has its west coast main line stop at Hartford station in my constituency. Cross Country has reduced the number of stops at Hartford, and we are also about lose the stop on the Liverpool to Birmingham run. One way of reducing congestion on the M6 would be to encourage train operators to make better use of Hartford station.

Dr. Howells: I take my hon. Friend's point. We certainly have to look very hard at those local services and at the way in which we utilise lines in that area, but we also need to realise that if we are to make best use of the tracks, we must look carefully at the timetable and ensure that the slow trains are not slowing down trains that should be fast. I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about that difficulty, but I shall take a look at the specific issue that he raises and try to get back to him.

Crossrail

6. **Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): If he will make a statement on Crossrail. [125439]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): As I announced yesterday, I have now received from Cross London Rail Link its updated business case for Crossrail. The Government will need to evaluate the proposals thoroughly to ensure that they are feasible. At the same time, I have asked CLRL to press ahead with its development of detailed project proposals, including advising on updating the safeguarding of the route and undertaking a public consultation exercise on the route in the autumn.

Mike Gapes: I have been pressing Ministers for Crossrail for 11 years, so I am pleased that the Government yesterday gave their support in principle. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on that, but can he assure me, and millions of Londoners and visitors to this city, that there will be no further unnecessary delays in the project, that early legislation will be introduced in the hybrid Bill and that trains will be running from Shenfield through Ilford and Stratford, and from Paddington to Heathrow, on Crossrail within a decade?

Mr. Darling: As I have told the House on a number of occasions, I believe that the Crossrail project is very important for the future of London. It is equally important, however, to ensure that we get it right. The last attempt to build Crossrail in the 1980s and 1990s foundered because not enough attention was given to the detail involved in the project. That is why it is

important that the public consultation, which will be carried out this autumn, should deal with the route and all the proposals in some detail to ensure that the business case stacks up.

On any view, this is an extremely expensive project. It is very important now that all the people in London who said that they were willing in principle to pay for the project should realise that we are now at a stage where we need from them not only support, but cash. As the report recognised, the project must be a joint venture between the Government and the private sector, so it is time for people who say that they support it to reach for their wallets and come up with very firm proposals.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): What does the Secretary of State expect the precise cost of the project to be, and are he and the Treasury absolutely committed to guaranteeing its delivery?

Mr. Darling: That is a bit rich coming from someone who is committed to wholesale cuts in public expenditure. We did not get Crossrail under the last Tory Government and we will not get it under the next Tory Government. As the business case makes clear, the cost will be in excess of £10 billion. Clearly, the precise cost will depend on the route and the construction of the service. As I made clear in my statement yesterday, the Chancellor and I intend to consult London businesses and others to ensure that we secure the best and most effective way of funding the project. Before the hon. Gentleman next gets to his feet, I remind him that for as long as he is committed to 20 per cent. cuts in public spending, anything that he says about funding has to be taken with a pinch of salt.

Mr. Collins: Yesterday, as a result of an exclusive interview with the Secretary of State, the *Evening Standard* ran, uncorrected by his Department, the headline: "Crossrail gets £10bn go-ahead". It now turns out that it might not be £10 billion and that it did not really get a go-ahead at all. Will the Secretary of State confirm that under his plans, trains will not be remotely punctual before 2010, most of the roads that he announced last week will not be completed before 2012, and Crossrail may still never happen? How much longer do the long-suffering travelling public have to wait before he and his colleagues get their act together?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman, all too typically, is shifting his ground away from the point that I made about Crossrail. The one thing that all transport, whether road or rail, has lacked in the past is high levels of sustained investment. I concede that the problem bedevilled successive Governments of both major parties, but the Conservatives, in the 10 years prior to their losing the 1997 general election, cut the amount of money going into road and rail. That lack of investment is one reason why the public are now suffering. We are putting that right by investing in the railways and roads. The Conservative party remains committed to a 20 per cent. reduction in public expenditure, much of which will come out of spending on roads. If Conservative Members are worried about my saying that, they should just look at the results of what they did in office.

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I, too, welcome my right hon. Friend's support in principle for Crossrail, for which I have pressed for several years on behalf of my constituents in Reading. I welcome the opportunity that it provides for better rail links to Heathrow, thus reducing congestion on the roads. Will he consider using the opportunity of Crossrail to ensure that there is a western rail link to Heathrow with its end at Reading?

Mr. Darling: I am afraid that I must caution my hon. Friend and others that if Crossrail is to get the final go-ahead and be built, it is important to have a manageable project. One of the reasons why it sank under the Conservative Government was that not enough attention was paid to its detail, feasibility and deliverability. I am all in favour of improved links between Reading and Paddington—indeed, last week I referred to a proposal that will allow better links between the Thames valley and Heathrow airport, which will help my hon. Friend's constituents—but, in relation to Crossrail, let us concentrate on having a project that is manageable and deliverable. If that happens, there is every chance that London will actually get it, rather than its being the mere pipedream that it was under the Conservative Government.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): Can the Secretary of State confirm that, as is the case with expenditure on the London underground, any proposed public spending on the London Crossrail initiative will result in consequential increases for the devolved Administrations, which will allow us to get on with the Glasgow and Aberdeen crossrail proposals and the proposal to rebuild the north-south rail link in Wales? Will he make such representations to himself as Secretary of State for Scotland?

Mr. Darling: If the hon. Gentleman had spent more time practising his question, it might have had better effect. We are spending money on the railways throughout the United Kingdom. That would not be possible were Wales ever to become a separate state, in which case it would not have that money. The fact is that money is being spent on the railways throughout the United Kingdom, which will benefit the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Has my right hon. Friend had the opportunity to read the report of the Select Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government, entitled "Reducing Regional Disparities in Prosperity"? Given his announcement last week on road improvements, out of which the north-east did very badly, his recent scepticism about policies such as expanding the Tyneside metro system and his apparent enthusiasm for Crossrail, does he believe that the Department is entering fully into the spirit of the Government's policies on reducing regional disparity?

Mr. Darling: Yes, I do. If my hon. Friend examines identifiable public spending by region, he will realise that although a great deal of money is undoubtedly

spent in London for clear reasons, the north-east is the next most obvious beneficiary. A case can be made for spending more on transport and other matters in every area of the country. We are trying to ensure that our approach is fair for the whole country. I understand my hon. Friend's point about last week's announcement in which I was able to give the go-ahead to some projects but not others, but if he examines the figures for identifiable public expenditure, he will find that the Government are spending substantial sums of money in the north-east, as they are entitled to do.

Speed Cameras

7. **Mr. Andrew Mackay** (Bracknell): If he will make a statement on the impact of speed cameras on traffic safety. [125440]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): An independent report on the two-year trial of the cost recovery system for speed and red-light cameras was published on 11 February 2003. It found, on average, a 35 per cent. reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured at camera sites, equating to around 280 people, and a 4 per cent. reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured in the trial areas, equating to approximately 530 people.

Mr. Mackay: Is not the truth that the Government's policy on speed cameras is a complete muddle and mess? It is despised by motorists, who perceive it as simply another stealth tax. Would it not be much better to tear down speed cameras on safe motorways and dual carriageways and instead concentrate on serious blackspots and on traffic lights to prevent people from jumping traffic lights and blocking junctions, thus causing congestion in our urban areas?

Mr. Jamieson: If the right hon. Gentleman had done his homework, he would have realised that the cameras in the netting-off scheme can be placed only at sites where there is a considerable amount of injuries. Perhaps he and colleagues should speak to some of the people in urban areas who have speed cameras in their locality that have greatly reduced the number of people killed or seriously injured. Conservative Members must reflect carefully on their policy of removing cameras because they will have to explain to the people in those areas the casualties and deaths resulting from their policies.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Is my hon. Friend aware of the huge public support for the Government's swift action in installing speed cameras on the dangerous section of the Stocksbridge bypass across the Pennines? People would be horrified at the idea that an incoming Government would simply remove speed cameras, which have so far prevented any further major accidents on that road.

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend makes my point. The cameras are usually popular with local people in the areas where they are installed. Indeed, there would be ructions in some places if the cameras were removed because people know that they reduce injuries, especially to children and often to elderly people. Those two categories are the most vulnerable on our roads. I assure my hon. Friend that our policy of ensuring that cameras are located at the sites of the most casualties will continue. I ask the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay) and other Conservative Members to reflect on their policy.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Is not the Minister's argument based on a fallacy? He is not considering the overall impact on road casualties and deaths. If speed cameras are so effective, why were more people killed on our roads last year than in 1998?

Mr. Jamieson: It is true that the number of people killed on our roads has remained steady at about 3,400 for several years. As I said to the hon. Gentleman in a recent debate, that is partly because of the increased amount of traffic on our roads and the increase in the number of miles that people are travelling. The number of people being seriously injured has, however, been reduced. The hon. Gentleman should look not just at the camera sites but at the areas in which they have been installed, because there has been a substantial reduction in the number of people killed and seriously injured not only at the sites, but across the areas as well.

Integrated Transport (Bridgend)

8. **Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend): If he will visit Bridgend to discuss his policies for developing integrated transport as they affect Bridgend. [125441]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Dr. Kim Howells): My hon. Friend will be aware that the responsibility for developing integrated transport, along with much of the funding in the relevant transport areas, has been devolved to the National Assembly for Wales. It will therefore be for the Assembly, working with Bridgend borough council, to develop suitable policies in this area.

Mr. Griffiths: I appreciate that that is the case, but there is nevertheless an important role for the Department of Transport—with its responsibility for railways—in terms of taking initiatives to enable the proper integration of the bus and railway stations in my constituency. Although they are only about 160 m apart, up a sharp hill, that is a disincentive for the people using them. I look to the Department to blaze a trail by offering incentives to bring bus and railway stations together. In fact, that would very much help the Minister's own constituency of Pontypridd.

Dr. Howells: The lunatics who run my local authority, namely the Welsh nationalists, see no sense whatever in bringing together a bus station and a railway station that are 250 m apart. I have been trying to make this point to them for a very long time, and I hope that they will listen to it now. We are certainly interested in promoting the integration that my hon. Friend mentioned, wherever we can. The Welsh Assembly has a large tranche of money, which it sometimes uses very judiciously to try to promote the integration of traffic. I am glad that it is doing so and I hope that that work will continue.

A556

9. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): What plans he has to improve the A556 between the M6 and M56. [125442]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): The Secretary of State recognises the importance of this route and has asked the Highways Agency to look for innovative ways of making best use of this road and to investigate methods of tackling congestion at the key junctions along the route. In response to this, the Highways Agency has recently appointed Hyder Consulting to produce a route management study for this important trunk road.

Mr. Osborne: The A556 is a dangerous, polluted road that goes through a residential area, and is the main link between Manchester, Birmingham and London. Surely the Minister will accept that it is unsuitable for that purpose. Some people wanted a new motorway link in the area; others, including me, wanted junction 20 of the M6 improved. If nothing is done, the Government will find that this eight-lane M6 superhighway will come to a juddering halt at the two-lane A556. This route needs serious upgrading.

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are not doing nothing, as I illustrated in my first answer. There will be a route management study. There will also be a meeting this Friday in the hon. Gentleman's constituency between the various interested parties who will consider the important issues relating to that road, and we have already announced a £1.2 million scheme at Bucklow Hill. We recognise that this is an important issue, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his friends in the area will be able to attend some of these meetings to consider the positive way in which we can make improvements.

Road Charging

11. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): What studies he is making on future road charging policy; and if he will make a statement. [125444]

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): Just in time!

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): A just-in-time question; it is good of the hon. Gentleman to join us. As I announced on 9 July and set out in the strategy paper published on that day, we shall be carrying out a feasibility study of road user charging.

Michael Fabricant: I thank the Secretary of State for that not-so-charming reply. I have just been in the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, which, under the new hours, meets at the same time as these proceedings in the Chamber, and in which we are currently interviewing representatives of the BBC.

The Secretary of State knows that we shall have a toll road in 2004 when the M6 toll is introduced. What consideration is he giving to differential tolling to encourage local people to use such toll roads? Initially, promises were made that there would be a thorough investigation by the M6 toll group to see whether discounts could be offered to local users, but it was decided not to offer such discounts. What is the Secretary of State's view on this?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the M6 toll road concession was granted in the early 1990s and that few conditions were attached to it. The concessionaire was allowed to build the road and then charge its tolls. I dare say that, if we were starting again now, we would probably take a rather different approach.

On road user charging generally, we are currently at the stage of simply assessing what is feasible. Charging differential rates to encourage people to use the roads at less busy times is one policy under consideration. We could also consider area charging—in circumstances where main trunk roads are effectively being used as local roads—in order to deal with some of the problems to which the hon. Gentleman referred. A whole variety of measures could be adopted, which is why I am extremely disappointed that the Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen will not accept the need to examine even the feasibility of various proposals. They simply rule them out, which I believe is selling short future generations, who will expect the Government to demonstrate some leadership and assess what might be possible with the use of new technology.

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister for the Cabinet Office was asked—

Civil Contingencies (North Yorkshire)

20. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What assessment he has made of contingency planning for emergencies in North Yorkshire. [125455]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Douglas Alexander): North Yorkshire has had recent experience of dealing with contingencies after the extensive flooding of previous years. Direct assessment of emergency planning at the local level is carried out through bodies such as the Audit Commission and Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary as part of their wider assessment work.

Miss McIntosh: I thank the Minister for that reply, but is he aware that during the floods of autumn 2000 there was a breakdown of communications, particularly at silver command level, in the city of York? Are he and his Department convinced that every aspect of the new contingencies will be examined, including vital communications in the midst of a flood?

Mr. Alexander: I can give the hon. Lady the assurance that flooding is one of the contingencies anticipated in the draft Civil Contingencies Bill. Communication between local respondents is obviously important, and we believe that the Bill's approach reflects the fact that

collaborative work with a wide range of local responders is often—as in the example that she provided—necessary.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Speaking as someone who sat in the silver command meetings during the crisis of the York floods—where I met people from the Army, the fire service, the police, the utilities and other agencies working together, as well as people such as councillors and Members of Parliament who were invited in—I should like to say that the system worked extremely well. Will the Minister join me in congratulating all the emergency services on their response to that crisis, and, indeed, to the Selby rail crash? Does he recognise that it is because more resources are going into those services that they are able to train for emergencies, and that the Conservative policies of cutting public expenditure would ruin—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Alexander.

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend raises several important points. First, the local respondents acted extremely effectively in those emergencies, and I would also like to pay tribute to the BBC, which, through its local radio service in Yorkshire, was able to communicate a range of important pieces of information to the community at a very difficult time.

My hon. Friend also raises the important question of resources. It would benefit the House if I made it clear that during the last spending review, we allocated extra funds, bringing a real growth average of 8.6 per cent. a year in respect of flood warning and defences. That amounts to a total of £564 million by 2005–06. Of course it is important that local respondents work effectively, but they need resources to do the job, which is why we have committed those extra funds.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): The Minister has been very interesting on flooding, but will he turn his attention to other disasters that might engulf North Yorkshire? He will be aware that the head of MI5 recently warned about radiological, biological and chemical attacks. He will also be aware that, in the event of such an attack on Sellafield being successful, more than 44 times the amount of radioactive material that came from Chernobyl would certainly engulf the whole of Yorkshire. Will the Minister tell us what specific contingency plans exist for North Yorkshire in the event of such a disaster?

Mr. Alexander: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new position on the Opposition Front Bench in respect of Cabinet Office questions. I have a couple of points to make. First, Sellafield is not in North Yorkshire. Secondly, of course there is the potential for a real disaster for North Yorkshire—the re-election of a Conservative Government. However, it is important to recognise that a serious threat level remains. If specific intelligence and information come to the Government's attention about a specific threat, that information would be brought, without hesitation or delay, to the attention of the emergency services and the British public. The draft Civil Contingencies Bill covers North Yorkshire and will specifically ensure that duties are laid on local authorities and other local respondents to build on the success already achieved in recent years in respect of developing resilience capability.

Government Information Systems

21. **Ms Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley): What steps have been taken to improve the security of Government information systems. [125456]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Douglas Alexander): All Government information systems are required to meet specified security standards, which are regularly reviewed in the light of the prevailing threats. To ensure that Government Departments' most critical information processes are adequately protected, Departments are adopting the international standard for information security management.

Ms Munn: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Many private-sector organisations are involved with the public sector in these information systems. What assurance can my hon. Friend give that the partnerships between the private and public sectors are strong and will be maintained in a way that will ensure the security of the information?

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend raises an important point. In October 2002, the central sponsor for information assurance was established by the Government. The CSIA works with both the public and private sectors, and international counterparts, to help safeguard the nation's IT and telecommunications services. We need to be able to tap in effectively to the expertise that exists in the private sector, as well as to that in the public sector. This is, of course, a very serious issue.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): Does the Minister agree that an ability to audit the source code of key software applications is an important element in securing Government information systems? Do the Government prefer to have accessible source code for their security systems?

Mr. Alexander: The issue of source codes is being considered across Government at the moment, in terms of both open-source software and the more general point of security that has been raised. I shall be happy to write to the hon. Gentleman on the specific point that he has raised today.

Regulatory Reform Action Plan

22. **Mr. Andrew Love** (Edmonton): What progress has been made in implementing the regulatory reform action plan. [125457]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Douglas Alexander): We are on course to deliver the commitments set out in the regulatory reform action plan published last year. This is a three-year programme and, as of April this year, 31 per cent. of the measures in the plan had been completed. We will be publishing a formal progress report at the half-way stage in the autumn of this year.

Mr. Love: I thank the Minister for that reply. He will be aware of the concerns about the regulatory burden, especially among small businesses. He will also know that the Select Committee on Regulatory Reform is willing and able to take up the cudgels in this area on the Government's behalf. What action does he intend to take to ensure that the action plan is implemented by the end of this Parliament?

Mr. Alexander: I hope that I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. This is a matter of concern to me; and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that it is one of the Government's priorities. The National Small Business Council has recently published an important report on this area of work, to which I shall give due consideration. It is worth noting the comments from the Economist Intelligence Unit and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. In two recent reports, the OECD identified the strength of the better-regulation agenda in Britain, compared with that of our international counterparts.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Is the Minister aware that the British Chambers of Commerce, no less, has said that red tape is growing like topsy, damaging jobs and our economy and destroying our international competitiveness? It is probably even more damaging than Labour's massive tax hikes, which businesses have had to suffer.

Mr. Alexander: If the hon. Gentleman wants to trade quotes from business associations, we should look at what Digby Jones of the Confederation of British Industry said in the *Sunday Express* on 12 January of this year. He said:

"Britain is definitely the best place to do business, compared with the rest of Europe."

Although we must of course continue to strengthen our work on regulation, Britain easily bears comparison with many international competitors.

Civil Service Recruitment (Disabled People)

23. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): If he will make a statement on the recruitment of people with disabilities to the civil service. [125458]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The Government are committed to employing disabled people and, as of October 2002, disabled staff accounted for 3.6 per cent. of the civil service. That is an increase from 2.8 per cent. in 1995.

Mr. Edwards: Does my hon. Friend accept that 12.6 per cent. of the active UK population has a mobility problem and that those people are under-represented in the civil service? Will he give me an assurance that recruitment policies will be improved to widen access for people with disabilities to that major employer?

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend makes a number of important points. Of course, that is a matter on which we will continue to work. It might assist the House if I mention first the new recruitment guide that the Cabinet Office has published, which provides specific best practice instances of recruitment of disabled staff. Secondly, the Cabinet Office sponsors Ready, Willing, Able, an organisation that supports the recruitment of disabled staff. We are also introducing a summer placement scheme for disabled recruitment. In that regard, I take seriously the points that my hon. Friend has raised, but I hope that I have assured him that this is a matter that the Government are taking forward with some expedition.

Iraq

12.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement to update the House on the situation in Iraq before we rise for the summer recess.

When the regime of Saddam Hussein collapsed just over three months ago, we made two key undertakings to the Iraqi people: first, that we would rally international support for their country's reconstruction; and secondly, that we would remain in Iraq only as long as it took to establish an elected, representative Iraqi Government, able themselves to maintain their internal security.

First, on Iraq's reconstruction, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1483 on 22 May. That resolution gave the UN a vital role in all aspects of Iraq's development, including the political process. Under that resolution, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed as his special representative Sergio Vieira de Mello, the highly respected United Nations high commissioner for human rights. Resolution 1483 freed Iraq from the UN sanctions regime, allowing oil revenues to be spent on humanitarian needs, economic reconstruction and other purposes benefiting the people of Iraq.

On Sunday, an important step was taken towards fulfilling the second undertaking—the establishment of a sovereign Iraqi Government. The convening of the Iraqi governing council is a significant development. The council is the principal body of the interim administration called for in resolution 1483. Mr. Vieira de Mello has described the formation of the council as a "defining moment" for Iraq,

"moving it back where it rightfully belongs: at peace with itself and as a full participant in the community of nations."

The governing council has 25 members: 13 are Shi'a, 11 are Sunni and one is Christian. The interim chairman is a Shi'a cleric, Mohammed Bahr al-Uloum. Twenty per cent. of the council is Kurdish, representing their share of the population. Fourteen members lived in Iraq throughout much of Saddam Hussein's rule. Three members are women—12 per cent. of the council.

The governing council will exercise significant powers. These should expand over time. I am placing in the Library a full list of members and the statement agreed between the governing council and the coalition provisional authority establishing the authorities of the council.

Let me summarise the main points for the benefit of the House. The council will be involved in all the decisions that the coalition provisional authority takes from now on. It will nominate new Ministers to lead Iraq's ministries, hold them to account and have the power of dismissal. Its members will be able to represent Iraq internationally. It will determine the national budget for next year.

The contrast with the Ba'athist regime could not be starker. Membership of the council itself emerged from an exhaustive process of consultation among representative groups, many of whose leaders I met in Baghdad two weeks ago. The council includes the leaders of 14 Iraqi parties, with prominent figures from Islamist groups and the Communist party. It will govern by consent not terror. It is the first time in living memory that the Shi'as, who form a majority in Iraq, have had a majority in any national governing body there.

One of the council's first jobs will be to determine how a new constitution for Iraq should be prepared. Once adopted, that constitution will pave the way for the election of an Iraqi Government who will assume all the powers and responsibilities currently held by the coalition provisional authority. Sergio Vieira de Mello will brief the UN Security Council next Tuesday on those and other political developments and on the role of the governing council; the council has already announced that it will be sending a delegation to the Security Council for that meeting.

Whatever position hon. Members may have taken on the need for military action, these developments will, I am sure, be welcomed by the whole House, but the progress that has been made is opposed by groups loyal to Saddam Hussein who resent the loss of their powers and wish to disrupt progress to political reform. The main problems are in the area to the north and west of Baghdad, the so-called Sunni triangle, from where much of the republican guard was recruited. Although those individuals do not pose a serious challenge to Iraq's democratic future, they do threaten coalition forces and those Iraqis who are helping to build their country. Nine British soldiers have been killed in Iraq since the end of large-scale combat operations in mid-April, bringing to 43 the total number of deaths of British service personnel since the beginning of military action. I know that I speak for the whole House in underlining our condolences to the families and friends of those killed, and in saluting both their courage and that of those who have been injured.

When in Basra two weeks ago, I was able to speak to the close colleagues of the Royal Military Police officers who were killed at Majar-al-Kabir and to the paratroopers involved in the parallel engagements. The commitment and professionalism of those I met, and of all British forces, is something of which this country must be, and is, immensely proud. Of course, we pay equal tribute to the United States service personnel who have been killed or injured in Iraq.

On the whole, the Shi'a south has been calm and overwhelmingly supportive of Saddam's demise. In the UK area of operations, joint patrols by British troops and Iraqi police have been under way since mid-April. Major cities in the north with mixed populations, such as Mosul and Kirkuk, have generally been calm. The coalition provisional authority estimates that 100 courtrooms and eight prison facilities are now operational. One of the CPA's top priorities has been to restore the rule of law in the capital, Baghdad. That is slowly taking place, although the situation is not yet satisfactory. Thirty-four Iraqi police stations in Baghdad are open 24 hours a day, and 9,000 police officers have returned to duty in the capital.

There have also been improvements in the provision and delivery of essential services. The Iraqi national budget for the period July to December this year, announced by the CPA on 7 July, included increases for health care. The authority has also announced that all 240 hospitals in Iraq are now operational and that

[Mr. Jack Straw]

98 per cent. of schools are open. When I was in Basra two weeks ago, the commander of the British forces told me that 17,000 students in the universities in their sector were taking their final examinations in the normal way.

Reconstruction would be moving ahead more quickly were it not for the attacks by remnants of the old regime on the electricity and oil pipeline infrastructure. As a result Baghdad is receiving only between 70 and 90 per cent. of pre-war water supply, but across the entire country more Iraqis have access to electricity supplies than before the war. Delivery of food through Iraq's public distribution system is now reaching the entire country. Preliminary figures for June show that food rations were distributed to about 26 million Iraqis in a target population of 27 million. Food distribution is being extended to the Marsh Arabs, a people who I understand received no food rations at all under Saddam Hussein. As the security situation in Iraq stabilises, the World Food Programme is increasingly using the port of Umm Qasr for its deliveries, and the £150 million in funding for humanitarian projects already committed by our own Department for International Development is beginning to have an impact on the ground.

Reconstruction plainly requires a significant effort by the whole international community, however. A preliminary meeting of donors co-chaired by the CPA and the United Nations Development Programme was held in New York on 24 June; a full conference will be held in October. Countries are coming forward to join coalition forces. In addition to the 147,000 US and 11,000 UK service personnel in theatre, those forces include personnel from Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, Poland, Norway, the Czech Republic, New Zealand, Ukraine and Lithuania.

On 18 March, the House voted by a majority of 263 to approve military action, principally because of Iraq's palpable failure to comply unconditionally and immediately with the terms of United Nations Security Council resolution 1441, by which the Security Council itself had said that Iraq's proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, its long-range missile systems and its non-compliance with a string of Security Council resolutions, dating back to 1991, posed a threat to international peace and security. The evidence on which that decision was based was overwhelmingly from open sources and was laid before the House in a number of Command Papers, which included UNMOVIC's 173-page report, "Unresolved Disarmament Issues: Iraq's Proscribed Weapons Programmes". I am in no doubt that the House's decision on 18 March is as justified today as it was when we took it.

Of course, given the magnitude of the decisions that the House took, it is entirely right that Parliament should conduct its own inquiries into the decision to go to war. I know that the whole House is grateful to the Foreign Affairs Committee for its inquiry and to Members of both Houses on the Intelligence and Security Committee who are conducting a related inquiry. The Government will, of course, respond in detail in the normal way to their reports. The House will also wish to know that the Iraq survey group is now deployed and will report at appropriate times. However, the following may assist the House on the issue of yellowcake from Niger, which was also raised yesterday, among other things, by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson).

As I have already explained to the Foreign Affairs Committee, we had no knowledge that the documents given to the International Atomic Energy Agency were forged until February 2003, and in a letter last Friday to the Foreign Affairs Committee, which I have placed in the Library, I set out the position relating to the report of Ambassador Joe Wilson. As I have made clear, we had, and have, other separate information available to us. Moreover, the 24 September dossier itself concluded that unless Iraq obtained fissile material—yellowcake is not fissile material—Iraq would need at least five years to be in a position to produce a nuclear weapon.

With the establishment of the governing council, the Iraqi people have embarked on the process of building their own future. More than 150 newspapers have been launched since the fall of Baghdad. Major cities and towns across Iraq now have municipal councils, where Iraqis are increasingly taking responsibility for local issues. Iraqis are speaking out and demonstrating with a vigour not seen for decades. At the launch of the governing council last Sunday, we saw many of the features of democracy. Yes, there was criticism, strong disagreement and compromise—all now possible in the new Iraq, all previously punishable by arrest or worse under Saddam Hussein.

Meanwhile, the scale of the atrocities perpetrated by Saddam Hussein's regime becomes more apparent by the day. Tens of thousands of bodies have so far been unearthed in mass graves. In its latest assessment, I am told that the Red Cross estimates that 300,000 Iraqis are "missing"—the victims, in the Red Cross's terms, of "internal violence". I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) for her tireless work as our special envoy on human rights. The leader of the British forensic team in Iraq, Professor Margaret Cox, has commented that Saddam's regime

"was propped up with the bones of the Iraqi people buried beneath its sands."

The dead and the missing are the most painful reminder of Saddam Hussein's brutal dictatorship. They should also become the greatest symbol of our determination to give Iraq the future that its people so richly deserve.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his statement and for advanced sight of most of it—I think that there were one or two additional words.

It has been a matter of concern that this is the first time that the Foreign Secretary has come to the House of his own accord to report on the status of Iraq since 12 May. It is now clear that Government preparations for handling the problems of post-war Iraq were not all that they were cracked up to be. It may be that the Foreign Secretary decided to wait until he had something more positive to report. I agree that what he has reported today is positive, and I thank him for that. I also agree that we must never forget the brutality of Saddam Hussein's regime and the atrocities that he visited on his people.

I, too, want to pay tribute to the tremendous work that our armed forces, and other British personnel, are carrying out in very difficult circumstances. We owe

them a great debt of gratitude. I also pay tribute to those who have died while selflessly working to help restore and maintain public order and the rule of law in Iraq. We can indeed be proud of them, and our thoughts are with their families. We warmly welcome the recent appointment of the national governing council. It is vital that authority over Iraq is restored to Iraqis as soon as possible. This is an important beginning, and we wish the council well.

What role did the British Government have in choosing the members of the governing council? Is the Foreign Secretary satisfied with the balance between formerly exiled Iraqis and those who have been living in Iraq throughout the last period? I note that, along with the real and important powers that he described, the council will also help draw up a constitution in preparation for elections. Sergio Vieira de Mello, the UN's special envoy to Iraq has said that elections

"probably will be held in 2004".

That seems a very swift time scale for the council and the coalition to prepare a constitution and to prepare for elections. Does the Foreign Secretary agree with that estimate of time scale?

In that context, what steps are being taken to communicate to the people of Iraq ideas on plans for the future government of Iraq? Does the Foreign Secretary not agree that without an effective communication system there will be a real risk of fuelling anxiety and hostility among the people of Iraq? I see that Ambassador Paul Bremer has a veto over the council. Can the Foreign Secretary outline the conditions under which Mr. Bremer can exercise that veto?

The Foreign Secretary rightly made clear that restoring security and order must remain the coalition's top priority. Does he believe that the coalition has enough peacekeeping forces on the ground to achieve that? There has been much speculation about the role that NATO might play in the longer-term stabilisation of Iraq. Can he explain why NATO's role is still so limited? Now that NATO is taking over the international security assistance force mandate in Kabul on 11 August, cannot NATO play a similar role in Iraq?

What is the Government's assessment of the threat to coalition forces in Iraq? Are the attacks on our soldiers just from remnants of the regime and other rogue elements, as the Foreign Secretary seemed to suggest in his statement, or are there signs of a more co-ordinated guerrilla campaign, with the objective of forcing the coalition on to the defensive and, eventually, to withdraw?

I have listened to what the Foreign Secretary has had to say about yellowcake from Niger. This is yet one more element of the web of confusion that the Government have managed to create over the status of intelligence material relating to weapons of mass destruction. We will be debating this whole area in the House tomorrow. For the moment, will the right hon. Gentleman accept that the confusion, the charge and counter-charge, and the different voices within the Government on the issue of weapons of mass destruction, are entirely of the Government's making? It is damaging not only the reputation of the Foreign Secretary but the credibility of the Government and of the intelligence itself. It is also beginning to cloud the important work that we need to continue carrying out in Iraq. The Government cannot allow this drift of credibility to continue.

When will the Prime Minister publish the new evidence of weapons of mass destruction that he promised us in St. Petersburg on 31 May? Surely the time has come to clear this mess up. Why will he not set up a full, independent, forensic, judicial inquiry, which can establish the truth and restore confidence in British intelligence, which is so vital to our national interest? It is time that the Government got a grip of the situation and stopped this messing about.

Mr. Straw: Let me deal in turn with the points that the right hon. Gentleman raised. On statements to the House, I think that, generally speaking, Members believe that I make myself available for explanation very readily. There has been a debate, which was initiated by the Liberal Democrats. I am grateful to them, and the matter was well aired there. Iraq dominated Question Time last Tuesday. In addition, I certainly do not feel underexposed in terms of accountability, given the fact that I have given evidence in public and private session for five hours before the Foreign Affairs Committee, which is probably something of a record. The House needs to accept that one of the things that has changed in the past 20 years is that there is much greater involvement by Members in cross-examining Ministers, quite rightly—not only in the Chamber, but in Select Committees.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me about the Government's role in choosing the governing council. When I was in Iraq two weeks ago, one of the issues raised by those I was speaking to—some of the people now on the governing council—and publicly by Mr. Sistani, who is a cleric associated with the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, a Shi'a organisation, was whether the governing council would be, as it were, imposed by the UK-US coalition provisional authority or whether it would be able to derive its legitimacy—notwithstanding the fact that it had to be appointed rather than elected—in a more representative way.

Essentially, we were committed to doing the latter. Yes, the CPA made it clear that senior members of the Ba'athist regime would not be acceptable, but they would not have been acceptable to any other members of the governing council either. So we did not impose any individuals. It is my belief that, in the existing circumstances, this body has a high degree of consent from the Iraqis. Of course, it is only an interim council. We have to move from where we are to where we go next.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me about Mr. Vieira de Mello talking about elections for 2004. That is a comment that he has made. We have not yet made a judgment about what would be appropriate. We will have to see. Above all, we have to get this process, which the governing council is embarked on, to draft a constitution. Through that process, we will see where we go next.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about a communication strategy. I entirely agree about the need for a more effective communication strategy from the governing council and also from the CPA. He asked

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whether there are sufficient forces. So far as the US is concerned, that is obviously a matter for US commanders. As for the British forces there, my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Defence and the Prime Minister have made it clear that we keep the level of British forces under constant review and we take account very strongly of the advice that we receive from the commanders on the ground as well as from the chief of the defence forces.

The right hon. Gentleman asked for my assessment of the attacks on US and UK forces, principally on US forces. The assessment varies very much from area to area. Sometimes we are dealing with very small areas. Overall, it looks as though remnants of the Ba'athist regime along with criminals—some serious and others petty, but all of whom were let out by Saddam just before the military action and as it took place—are involved. That is our best assessment. Attacks are no doubt organised in small areas, but there is less information about the degree to which they are organised across the country. We do not believe that they are. However, one message has been delivered very firmly and clearly by US and UK forces, which is that we are not going to allow this activity to get in the way of the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Iraq or of the facility by which the Iraqis can build—not rebuild—a democracy for themselves for the first time.

The right hon. Gentleman then asked about the issues of intelligence. Let me make this clear. One of the things that emerged during the discussion on the 2 February dossier, from the Foreign Affairs Committee report, was that while, yes, there were mistakes made in the provenance—the process—behind that document, which I have apologised for, the FAC described the contents of the document as important. At no stage has it challenged the veracity of its contents. Its provenance should, of course, have been made clear.

As to the 24 September dossier, that was based, as, again, all sides of the Select Committee acknowledged, on assessments made by the Joint Intelligence Committee. We stand by those. It is inevitable that, given that there was controversy about the decision to take military action, questions will be raised, which is perfectly legitimate, but we stand by the assessments made.

I also remind the House—this was the position of the Opposition as well as of our side as we took military action—that, overwhelmingly, the decision to take military action was not based on intelligence assessments. It was based on the fact that— *[Interruption.]* It was not based on intelligence. It was based on the fact that resolution 1441 emphatically laid on Saddam Hussein, in open terms, obligations for him at long last to fulfil disarmament obligations, which had been extant but unfulfilled by Iraq for 13 years over a stream of Security Council resolutions; that all of us knew that the Iraqi regime had had a nuclear programme; that it had used chemical weapons; that it had a wholly concealed and very large biological weapons programme; that it had thrown out the inspectors for fear of further discoveries at the end of 1998; and that even having been given what not we but the whole United Nations described as a final opportunity to disarm, Saddam Hussein refused to comply unconditionally and completely with the requirements of resolution 1441.

For that reason, this House, by a very large majority, made the decision to take military action on 18 March—after an ultimatum had been given, which Saddam Hussein also refused. As I have said already, that decision, upholding the authority of the UN, was justified on 18 March and it is justified today.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I thank the Foreign Secretary for early sight of his statement. Like him, I agree that we should be unstinting in our support for UK forces, and unstinting indeed in our sympathy for those who have died or been wounded in Iraq. The whole House will welcome, as he rightly predicted, the progress in civil affairs that he was able to outline.

May I ask the Foreign Secretary a number of specific questions? What is the Government's view on the number of British forces that will be required to remain in Iraq, and for how long? Are UK forces in the same position as the forces of the US, whose tour of duty has today been extended indefinitely? How many of the dead and missing date from when the UK Government supported Saddam Hussein, who was by then already steeped in the blood of his own countrymen and countrywomen?

The Foreign Secretary will not be surprised if I return to the issue of an inquiry. I ask him to consider this: does not the absence of chemical and biological weapons, the embarrassing and apparently escalating dispute between Washington and London over Niger, the failure to find Scud missiles and the controversy over the February dossier make an irresistible case for an inquiry independent of Parliament and led by a senior judge? If the Government's position is as strong as he has set it out to be, both here today and elsewhere, what do they have to fear? Finally, might I ask him this question? If he was in opposition, would he not be expressing exactly the same view?

Mr. Straw: On the number of British forces, as I have told the House, there are 11,000 in theatre. The number is kept under review, as is the duration of their deployment, but we have already made it clear that the forces will be there as long as is necessary, but no longer, to secure a viable democratic, representative Government who in turn can secure their own security.

I am sorry, but I did not answer the question asked by the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) about the role of NATO, which is being used in Afghanistan. All I say to him is that that is under discussion. As he will know, there are 18 members on NATO's military committee and 19 on the NATO Council itself. Decisions have to be made by unanimity, which he strongly supports in other contexts.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Qualified majority voting.

Mr. Straw: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman is proposing QMV for NATO, let him come forward. It makes for swifter decisions but, in this field, it produces a certain amount of discontent.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): An acquis.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) is muttering that we need an acquis.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked how many of those who have been found dead or declared missing by the Red Cross were killed or went missing many years ago. I do not know what the time lines are. We know that up until Saddam Hussein's demise in mid-April, he ruled the country by terror, not consent. His main methods were imprisonment, torture, the denial of the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and, when necessary, death. Many people were killed under that brutal regime.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked about an inquiry. We have debated that before and we shall debate it tomorrow. I was not in the same position as him when I was in opposition. I supported the Falklands war at its beginning and end—I was right to do so. An inquiry on the Falklands that was separate from the House had to be established because the House did not have the mechanism to hold its own inquiries. I believe that the combination of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Intelligence and Security Committee is appropriate. The House accepted the establishment of the ISC without a vote. I ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman to consider the members of the Committee, who are as eminent as those who served on the Franks committee, and to have some faith in the ability of such eminent Members from all parties in both Houses to reach independent judgments.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): My right hon. Friend has given a positive report on the progress of the reconstruction of both physical infrastructure, such as electricity and water supplies, and governance, with the establishment of the new council. Is he therefore worried that the picture that our media give the British public is one of looting, shooting and general mayhem in which the population wants the end of the coalition forces' presence? Returning British civil servants reject the gloomy doomsayers and paint a picture of a talented people who are getting back to work and want to make a success of their country after the murderous regime of Saddam Hussein. Will my right hon. Friend try to strengthen the information side of the coalition provisional authority so that a rather more balanced picture may be conveyed to the British public?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful for what my right hon. Friend says. We accept the need to strengthen further the communication strategy of the coalition provisional authority and, as the shadow Foreign Secretary said, to ensure that the governing council—quite rightly that has more natural legitimacy with the Iraqi people—will be able to communicate. However, Ministers in a democracy are not responsible for how the media report, and nor should we be. I venture the opinion that it would take rather more than improved communications in Baghdad to get the focus of British newspapers away from where it is at present—no doubt they are pursing their own specific agendas—and for them instead to tell their readers about the situation on the ground. As my right hon. Friend said, that situation is rather different from that portrayed in several newspapers.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): If the governing council or the Iraqi people decide that they would like Iraq to be divided into three autonomous or semi-autonomous regions, notwithstanding likely Turkish objections, would the Government support the decision?

Mr. Straw: We would not support that. The United Nations made it clear in resolutions 1441 and 1483 that it would not support anything that would undermine the current territorial integrity of Iraq. Despite that, there are opportunities for various degrees of devolution to occur. I made the point to a group of Iraqi leaders two weeks ago that our experience shows that devolution need not occur on a symmetrical basis. Indeed, I believe the fact that we have developed asymmetrical systems is the reason why we have been better able to bind the Union. That is a lesson as the Iraqis develop their own constitution.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement. When our colleagues were alleging that they were concerned about the Iraqi people before voting against the only means of giving them their freedom, we made the point that when the people of Iraq were free, their ability to run their country would be demonstrated. That message is flowing through the middle east and people are finding out that we are living up to our words. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is having an impact on the middle east peace process by helping the Palestinians and Israelis to resolve that problem?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I do not resile from the fact that that was not the principal basis for the House's decision to go to war on 18 March, but it is worth bearing in mind that resolution 1441 deplored Saddam's appalling human rights record. The simple fact is that containment was not resolving the problem and that it was getting worse and worse. Irrespective of the arguments about whether military action was appropriate, if we had continued with a policy of containment, the atrocities perpetrated by Saddam Hussein would have continued—that is just reality.

On my hon. Friend's second point, it is true that we were told that if military action were taken in Iraq, there would be "conflagration" throughout the region. That has not happened. There was not a single Arab or Islamic leader who did not himself want to see the back of Saddam Hussein. There is no doubt in my mind that the removal of Saddam Hussein has made progress toward a peaceful solution for the Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians infinitely easier in practice.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Will the Foreign Secretary acknowledge that UN resolution 1441 refers not only to weapons of mass destruction programmes but to the weapons themselves? Does he further agree that the basis on which the House voted for war in Iraq was to disarm not merely Saddam Hussein's programmes of weapons of mass destruction but the weapons themselves?

Mr. Straw: Yes. The resolution is quite clear. There were 15 members of the Security Council. Two members—the UK and the US—took part in the military action and 13 did not, as a matter of record. Those members reached separate conclusions about the

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threat posed by Saddam Hussein and it was they who said that the proliferation of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction and long-range missile systems and his defiance of the United Nations posed a threat to international peace and security.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): I wonder whether the Foreign Secretary has noted the statement issued by the new Iraqi governing council that savaged the Arab media for romanticising the deposed dictator Saddam Hussein. It also attacked the BBC for

"not telling the truth about Iraq."

Does he share my concern that when faced with 300,000 missing people and mass graves and given that a vicious and murderous dictator has been removed and that freedom has been brought to a whole country for the first time in 20 years, it is strange that the BBC, and especially the "Today" programme, is obsessed with only bad-news stories about Iraq that damage the Government and the Prime Minister personally?

Mr. Straw: All I would say to my hon. Friend is that we have to accept the media as they are. It is no part of the duty of Governments in a democracy to interfere. However, I think it is the sentiment of the whole House, and certainly the sentiment in much of Iraq, that although the BBC should pursue particular agendas if it thinks that they are consistent with its charter, it should also ensure that there is a more balanced and comprehensive reporting of the reality on the ground in Iraq, which in respect of the rebuilding of Iraq is better news than it was.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): In his statement, the Foreign Secretary listed a number of countries, from Ukraine to New Zealand, which are apparently sending troops to Iraq. Significantly, he did not mention the numbers, which I suspect are very small. Is it not inevitable that we will soon need more troops from other countries because otherwise we will face overstretch? Is it correct that the French are blocking that in NATO?

Mr. Straw: On the right hon. Gentleman's last point, a number of other countries have expressed reservations within NATO. The discussions will continue. As for the numbers, I am happy to write to him and put them before the House. In some cases, the number is small. For example, Lithuania had no armed forces before it was turned into an independent country following the collapse of the old Soviet empire, so its contribution is necessarily going to be small. In other cases, such as Poland, the contribution will be substantial.

I note that the number of British service personnel has reduced from 45,000 at its peak to around 11,000 in the whole theatre—some are in the Gulf rather than in Iraq itself. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and the Chief of the Defence Staff keep overall troop levels under careful review. I have received no representations from them that at this level, or levels around which the number might fluctuate, the services will be subject to overstretch.

Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that if Iraq's oil is to be used for the purpose of reconstruction, that decision—certainly the mortgaging of the oil future and oil revenues—can only be taken by those who really represent the Iraqi people? To do otherwise would simply lead to the suspicion that the decision to invade, at least on America's part, was based on oil and not for the reasons of which the US Administration are trying to persuade us. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the British Government will not be party to a mortgaging of Iraqi oil unless that is agreed to by proper representatives of the Iraqi people?

Mr. Straw: Let me satisfy my hon. Friend. Resolution 1483 lays down clearly the conditions under which all revenues, in particular oil revenues, can be used, and have to be used, for the benefit of the people of Iraq. The war was never about oil. Everyone knows that. In the initial stages, the financial responsibility rests on the coalition provisional authority, because it has to rest somewhere. As quickly as possible, it will move to the governing council. In any event, there are clear and substantial monitoring arrangements, supervised by a monitoring board established by 1483. There is also the ever-present figure of Vieira de Mello, the UN Secretary-General's special representative, who is required to make regular reports to the Security Council to ensure that 1483 is complied with.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): If, as the Foreign Secretary now claims, the decision to go to war was not based on intelligence information, why did the Government keep providing it in the form of dossiers to the House and the UN before we made decisions? If the Prime Minister of Australia is prepared to apologise and the head of the CIA is prepared to take the rap for believing British intelligence, why does the Foreign Secretary stick doggedly to his story about the reality of the uranium imports from Niger to Iraq? If that story of the falsified and forged documents has caused so much embarrassment to the Government, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, what inquiries have been made to find out who falsified and forged those documents?

Mr. Straw: My point—it is a point that I have made often enough and is well illustrated by analysis of all the speeches made in our debates, especially since Christmas—is that the intelligence assessments that were provided formed part of the background, but they were not the heart of the argument and never were. They simply were not. The argument moved on.

The issue last September and October was whether the UN would be used to give what amounted to a final opportunity to Iraq. Everyone was pleased when we negotiated resolution 1441. Iraq was given a final opportunity and, as I explained, it failed to fulfil the clear undertakings required under 1441. The issue before the House in March, in shorthand, was whether containment was going to work, notwithstanding Iraq's defiance, or whether we had to give it a further very final ultimatum and, if necessary, take military action. I invite the hon. Gentleman to look at what was said and the nature of the argument, not to rewrite history following one reference on the "Today" programme on 29 May. That was simply not part of the argument. No one in the House, for example, mentioned 45 minutes once during the debate on 18 March.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, the issue of who forged the documents is a subject of an inquiry, in particular by the International Atomic Energy Agency, to which the documents were submitted. We did not know that they were forged. We had no information about that until mid-February and no confirmation of that until the IAEA gave its report to the Security Council on 7 March. On the overall issue of assessments, I have explained—I gave this information in memorandum to the FAC, and the ISC will inquire further—that the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee stands by the assessments that he and his staff, not Ministers, made.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Will the Secretary of State put in the Library of the House in the next 24 hours the dates on which the security and intelligence services learned that the Niger documents were forged and the date on which Ministers were advised that they were forged?

Mr. Straw: I will do my best to comply, if not in 24 hours, then as quickly as possible.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): The Foreign Secretary will be aware that military operations thrive on a simple clear aim. Given that we have 11,000 servicemen and women deployed, what is that aim?

Mr. Straw: The aim is to secure Iraq, to rid Iraq of the remains of the Saddam regime and to assist the Iraqi people, now through the governing council, to create conditions in which they are responsible for their internal security. I think all the forces are aware of that and they are meeting that challenge with their customary professionalism and very high standards.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): The Foreign Secretary has said again that it was not intelligence that led to the decision to go to war, but breaches of UN resolutions, although the rest of the Security Council did not feel able to support anything after 1441. Is it not the case that those of us who were sceptical and who opposed the case for war were told time and again that Iraq still had weapons of mass destruction, was still developing weapons of mass destruction and was ready to use them? If that did not come from intelligence sources, where did it come from?

Mr. Straw: Most of it came from documents that I placed before the House which were entirely open. No one can read the last report of UNSCOM made just after its delegation was thrown out of Iraq at the end of 1998 or the 173 pages of unanswered disarmament questions submitted to the Security Council after it had finished its meeting on 7 March without being absolutely clear about the capabilities of Iraq and its wilful failure to resolve the issues. If Iraq had nothing to fear, it would have dealt with those questions. It failed to do so. Of course the intelligence assessment informed the debate, but let us be clear that the issue before the House was whether the policy of containment had been laid out or whether we had reached a moment at which, in our judgment, it was right to take military action to enforce the will of the UN. The House voted in favour of that by a margin of 263.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): I hope that the Foreign Secretary will accept that the success of Iraqi reconstruction will, to some degree, be affected by the trial of Guantanamo bay detainees captured in Afghanistan. In that context, do the British Government believe that President Bush is acting wholly within and in accordance with international law and US law in setting up military commissions to try those detainees?

Mr. Straw: I am not entirely sure what is the direct connection, but intensive discussions on the issue continue with the American Administration. That is the current position, and as soon as there is anything to tell the House, the House will be told.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Let us be fair to the BBC concerning at least one of its media outlets. Did my right hon. Friend see last night's "Newsnight" that broadcast films made by the Saddam regime which showed savage beatings, torture and places of execution? Does he not agree that there is a responsibility on every Member of this House who opposed the war to tell us how one of the most terrifying and brutal dictatorships could have been destroyed without the action taken at the time?

Mr. Straw: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. As I have said, those who supported containment—I understood and respected their view, but did not agree with it—have an equal responsibility to acknowledge the fact that their policy would have left Saddam Hussein in power. He would have been reinvigorated and re-empowered as the troops were pulled back from the Gulf, and over time he would have tried to secure by deception a clean bill of health from UNMOVIC. The reign of terror over his people would have become infinitely worse, as would his support for international rejectionist terrorists—not least those working in the occupied regions. That is one reason why I say with confidence that a consequence of the removal of Saddam Hussein has unquestionably been to help to create a more benign environment in which a peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians is much more possible.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): The Foreign Secretary has made it clear—twice, I think—in his statement and in reply to hon. Members that our reasons for taking military action were based very much on Saddam Hussein's defiance of the United Nations. As somebody who absolutely supported the Government's action, I must say that the debate was undoubtedly influenced by reports based on intelligence not only that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, but that there was a clear and present danger of his using them.

I do not know whether weapons of mass destruction will be found in Iraq—I see that we have slipped into using the term "programmes", which is more vague. None the less, I am genuinely concerned that, if we do not find weapons of mass destruction or there is continuing debate about intelligence, should the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues face a clear and present danger in a year or two and ask the House for a

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decision on immediate military action, the House will say, "Sorry, but we've heard that before and we don't agree with you."

Mr. Straw: Of course I understand the interest in further evidence of the scale and extent of Saddam's programmes. Sometimes when I listen to these debates, I think that some of those who are now criticising the Government—not the hon. Gentleman—must be inhabiting a parallel universe in which, hey-presto, Saddam Hussein never had any nuclear capability, had never used chemical weapons against his own people or the Iranians and, despite evidence of concealment, had never denied that he had a biological weapons programme. He denied and denied that, and it was discovered only after his son-in-law had defected. Indeed, when the representatives of UNSCOM—the previous inspectors—went in, they discovered a much larger biological weapons programme than they had ever anticipated. This is not a matter of looking in the crystal; it was in the book.

Of course I understand and appreciate that some of the intelligence assessments formed a background to the argument, but I invite the hon. Gentleman and all other hon. Members to look at the terms of the motion passed by the House by a majority of 263 votes on 18 March. That was about the failure of Saddam Hussein to comply with the terms of resolution 1441.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): But surely my right hon. Friend cannot be unaware that the unwillingness, certainly of my constituents, to accept the rosy picture that he and other Ministers are painting of post-conflict Iraq is based on their total disbelief of the Government's reasons for us going to war in the first place. It is not possible for the Foreign Secretary to stand at that Dispatch Box and argue on the grounds of resolution 1441, which was based on the premise that Saddam Hussein still had weapons of mass destruction—a situation which the Prime Minister found still to be the case. Indeed, he discounted as absurd the thesis that those weapons had been unilaterally destroyed before the war began. Until the basic questions of precisely what was intelligence and how contemporaneous it was are answered, my constituents will remain exceedingly concerned about why British troops were sent to war.

Mr. Straw: I do not accept that. I say to my hon. Friend—

Glenda Jackson: Not me, my constituents.

Mr. Straw: I say to my hon. Friend, and through her to her constituents, that the judgment that Saddam Hussein had proliferated weapons of mass destruction, had long-range missiles and had defied the Security Council over 13 years was not just ours or that of the United States. It was the judgment of France, of Russia, of China and of the 10 elected members of the Security Council—also of Syria.

Glenda Jackson: Well, where are they?

Mr. Straw: A good deal of what was stated in the 24 September dossier in respect, for example, of the concealment of missile systems has already been confirmed to be wholly accurate and proved. If my hon. Friend had had her way, we would never have discovered the 500-plus missile engines. *[Interruption.]* They were there. The Iraqi survey group is now conducting its work. *[Interruption.]*

Let me deal with the way in which Saddam concealed his weapons. Recently, CNN reported that an Iraqi scientist, Mahaddi Ubaydi, who I am told was head of the centrifuge uranium enrichment programme, had volunteered information to the United States about centrifuge parts and documents concealed in his garden—*[Interruption.]* Yes, the documents related— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Allow the Foreign Secretary to answer.

Mr. Straw: I ask my hon. Friend to think about what she is saying. The documents related to 1991. She knows that it was possible to build nuclear weapons in 1991. The bigger question is why an Iraqi scientist was concealing those documents and centrifuge parts under a rose bush in his garden. He told CNN that he was ordered to hide them so as to be able to rebuild the bomb programme at some time in the future, which is exactly what we said.

Moreover, David Kay, a former United Nations arms inspector said:

> "It begins to tell us how huge our job is. Remember, this material was buried in a barrel behind his house in a rose garden. There's no way that that would have been discovered by normal international inspections. I couldn't have done it. My successors couldn't have done it."

That kind of concealment shows the extent of the deception practised by Saddam Hussein and is further evidence of the threat. Yes, it will be difficult, precisely because of the circumstances of concealment, to find the material, but gradually it is being found and so is other evidence.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): The Foreign Secretary was clearly right in his statement to underline the growing importance of the United Nations, the international community and particularly the pivotal role of Mr. Vieira de Mello. Following the announcement earlier this week, is the right hon. Gentleman yet in a position to tell the House which countries will be sending members of the team of experts that will pave the way for elections in Iraq?

Mr. Straw: No, I am not, but if I have more information when I get back to the office, I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Foreign Secretary has agreed to continue with matters relating to the statement, but the questions must be brief and there should be only one supplementary.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Could we return to the factual questions of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) about when the

Government first knew that the documents were forged? The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) asked who forged the documents, on whose behalf and why.

Mr. Straw: February this year is the answer to the first part of the question and, in answer to the second, we do not know, but we would like to.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): What steps will be taken to ensure that the constitution drawn up by the unelected council is acceptable to the various peoples and regions in Iraq? The Foreign Secretary's statement was silent about the armed services—when and how will a reformed army, capable of supporting the civil power, be brought into being?

Mr. Straw: The governing council, which is necessarily unelected at the moment, but far more representative than anything under the Saddam regime, has the job not only of drafting the constitution but of consulting widely on it. Although I am merely speculating, it would have to be endorsed using some democratic method by the people of Iraq. That is a guarantee. Moreover, de Mello has a clear role in respect of that. As for the reform of the armed forces, the first stage has been to establish a reformed police service, and the next stage will be to establish a reformed security service, including an army.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): If there are to be elections in 2004, will the Foreign Secretary assure the House that UK political parties and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy will be involved in the preparations to assist the process of building pluralistic democracy in Iraq?

Mr. Straw: We will make available to the governing council the excellent facilities and advice of the Westminster Foundation. Whether it is used is a matter for it, not us.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is the Foreign Secretary still completely convinced that Saddam Hussein tried to source uranium in Niger? If that is the case, can he say more about the intelligence sources that pointed to that but were apparently denied to the Americans?

Mr. Straw: I am satisfied that the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee who made those assessments has told me today, and has repeatedly told me, that he stands by them. They came from sources other than those that were available in America. That is the position, and it was set out very clearly in the dossier that we published on 24 September.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): My right hon. Friend will be interested to know that a senior member of the Iraqi Communist party came to see me this morning. He used to come here 20 years ago, bringing me names of dead, executed and disappeared people. He was against the war, but on Friday the Iraqi Communist party decided to join the governing body, which it regards as a momentous step forward in the history of Iraq. For the first time, the council will represent the diverse peoples of Iraq—the Sunni, the Shi'a, the Arab, the Kurd, the Turkoman and the Assyrian. I agree with my right hon. Friend that this is a marvellous opportunity which should not be forgotten.

Mr. Straw: I hope that the whole House takes note of that. The Iraqi Communist party, along with any Shi'a party and many others, simply could not operate under the Saddam regime. They had no rights, and were subject to the terror of Saddam.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): May I pay tribute to the valour of the soldiers of the 1st Battalion the Parachute Regiment, who fought with such bravery at Majar-al-Kabir a couple of weeks ago? However, there is no doubt that that attack was not orchestrated. The incident last week in which a young officer of the King's Regiment was wounded was, serving officers tell me, of a wholly different order of orchestration and organisation. On top of that, this week we have had a broadcast from a voice claiming to be that of al-Qaeda in the Gulf, saying that that organisation is active. Despite the Foreign Secretary's claims about not using intelligence to launch us into war, what is his assessment, based on intelligence reports, of al-Qaeda and the threat that it poses to our troops?

Mr. Straw: I have nothing directly to add to the answer that I have given to the hon. Gentleman's right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary. Obviously, the position has been carefully studied, and as I said to the House, it will vary from area to area. Of course, there are people both inside and outside Iraq who wish to make mischief, and whose vested interest is in ensuring or seeking to ensure that Iraq does not succeed. Our absolute determination, on the other hand, with the Iraqi governing council is to make sure that the new Iraq succeeds, and we shall win.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): May I make it crystal clear to the Foreign Secretary that I and, I suspect, many other Members did not vote for military action simply on the basis of weapons of mass destruction? We did it on the grounds of wider issues and the judgment, moral and political, that we needed to take action because of all the reasons in resolution 1441 and the underlying situation. Let us not fall into the terrible trap of focusing on one issue and rewriting history to try to pretend that there was not a major problem causing destabilisation in the middle east.

Mr. Straw: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. People who take an alternative point of view—and they are entitled to do so—must recognise that their inaction would have had very serious consequences for the Iraqi people and the wider region.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): Whatever the constituent parts of the assembly, total power in Iraq is still in the hands of the United States. The American people have been warned that this is something that may continue for years. Will we remain for as long as the American Administration considers it necessary, or is it possible that we will leave of our own accord?

Mr. Straw: As with the dispatch of troops, it is for the House to decide how long we remain there.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): When I was in Basra in early June, it was clear that the electricity and

[Mr. David Borrow]

water supplies were in a better condition than before the war and that law and order were improving. However, I read newspaper reports this morning that seemed to suggest that there were serious problems with the electricity and water supplies, and focused on lawlessness in Basra. Will my right hon. Friend tell me whether the situation in Basra has got better or worse since early June and, if it has got worse, what action the Government will take to improve the situation?

Mr. Straw: There will of course be incidents in different parts of Iraq which will result in the situation varying from day to day, but the overall assessment, as recently as this morning, is that particularly in the south the situation is getting better in many respects. Electricity and water supplies, for example, in most, but not all, parts of the south are better than they were before the regime fell.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): The Foreign Secretary reminded us that the invasion was not cost free, when he asked us to remember the coalition dead. Can we also remember the 6,000 Iraqis who died and the 15,000 who were injured? Does the Foreign Secretary accept that this business of uranium from Africa is rapidly becoming a farce for the British Government? Despite the attempts of the US Administration to recoup the situation, President Bush and the Prime Minister are apparently no longer singing from the same hymn sheet. This is about trust between our Government and the British people, so will the Foreign Secretary reconsider the request for an independent inquiry, as I do not think that anything else will satisfy my constituents?

Mr. Straw: I have to say that many of us have constituents who might otherwise take a similar position, but on this they all have different views. I repeat to my hon. Friend that, when I was on the Opposition Benches, I called for the establishment of a parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee. The Committee that was subsequently set up is composed of people who are at least as eminent and trustworthy as the very eminent and trustworthy members of the Franks committee 21 years ago, and we should show faith in the job that they are doing along with the job done by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Is my right hon. Friend aware that some of us worked with representatives of the Iraqi Communist party to oppose the invasion? Since then, we have worked with them on reconstruction and development of democracy, and we do not think that there is anything inconsistent about our involvement in those two activities. Can my right hon. Friend tell us, from the material that he is placing in the Library about the make-up of the Iraqi governing council, how much detail will be provided? Will details of the profession, political party, trade union links, press links and connections, and background in Iraq and elsewhere in the world be supplied? That is important to many of us who are looking towards the future reconstruction of Iraq.

Mr. Straw: A lot of information is on the sheets that will go into the Library. If my hon. Friend wishes for more, he should get in touch with me.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): How many prisoners are being held by coalition forces, and where? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the record of the United States is appalling in its disregard for international human rights in the way that it is treating 680 detainees at Guantanamo bay? Can he give us an absolute assurance that the highest levels of fair justice will be exercised when dealing with however many prisoners are being held in Iraq?

Mr. Straw: I assume my hon. Friend is speaking about prisoners held by the US and UK—

Helen Jackson: Coalition forces.

Mr. Straw: Yes, by coalition forces. I cannot give my hon. Friend an exact number straight away. I will write to her and place the reply in the Library of the House. I accept entirely the clear obligations of the coalition provisional authority under international law and under resolution 1483. For whatever reason they are held, people must be treated with proper regard for their human rights.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Further to the question from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews), when the Foreign Secretary says that we will remain in Iraq for as long as it takes to establish elected representative Iraqi government and internal security, given that we are by far the junior partner in the coalition, is he not saying, in effect, that we will remain in Iraq for as long as the Americans want us to? What capacity do we have for independent judgment about these issues?

Mr. Straw: It is the confidence that I have, which I am sorry my hon. Friend does not share, in the judgment of this House of Commons. It is we who decide whether or not troops should take up positions and how long they should stay there. Of course we are working with the Americans, but that is up to us. There are many situations in the world in which we do not join the Americans. In this case, we do. That is an independent decision by the House of Commons. My hon. Friend should have faith.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Has any decision yet been made about the considerable financial debt of the previous Ba'athist regime?

Mr. Straw: No decisions have been made. The matter is covered to a degree by 1483. However, quite a lot of the debtors—sovereign states and others—have been in touch with the coalition provisional authority to ask for their money, and we are considering their claims.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Have any serious challenges been made to the credibility of reports from the UK forensic team that there are at least 50 mass graves and evidence of at least 300,000 murders

during Saddam's regime? How many more people would have died or been tortured if Saddam had been left in power?

Mr. Straw: I have seen no challenges to those figures, horrifying though they are. I would say to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) that we grieve for anybody who has been killed or injured in whatever circumstances in Iraq. We do not know the exact number of people who were killed as a result of coalition action, but I grieve for them. I know for certain that within a year, far fewer people will have died as a result of coalition action and far more will have been free than ever would have occurred under the Saddam regime.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Members of two of the bereaved families have publicly asked the agonising question, "Did our loved ones die in vain?" For the first time in our history, it was we MPs who took the decision to send our soldiers to kill and be killed. Because of that, we cannot make independent judgments on our own decisions, whether we do it individually or collectively as Committees. Do we not need to give those bereaved families not just sincere condolences from every Member of the House, but an assurance that the reasons for the war will be exposed faithfully? Cannot that be done only by a fully independent inquiry?

Mr. Straw: No doubt we will discuss the matter further tomorrow, but I do not accept that. I shall develop the point tomorrow. My hon. Friend is right to this extent: it was not quite the first time that a substantive vote was taken, but it was the first time in the circumstances. I am proud to be a member of a Government who introduced that constitutional change, which will stand for all time. Of course, responsibilities go with it, but I do not accept that in a House of 651 Members, those whom we have chosen to serve on the Intelligence and Security Committee are not capable of independence of judgment in the circumstances. It must be acknowledged—this could not be examined by some independent judicial inquiry, as it is a political issue—that overwhelmingly, the basis on which we went to war was 1441. People talk about dossiers. I remind the House that those were the two dossiers that I submitted to the House in February and March, containing page after page of material, above all from UNMOVIC and the IAEA, revealing the extent of Saddam Hussein's failure to comply with the will of the United Nations. That was at the heart of the argument before the House on 18 March.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that both he and the Prime Minister, on numerous occasions and in numerous interviews, told the House and the public that the purpose of the war against Iraq was to disarm it of weapons of mass destruction? Does he accept that what he said today is an attempt at rewriting history, pretending that that was not the motive that was given, when it clearly was the motive that was given? In those circumstances, why does he not support an independent judicial inquiry that can make a judgment on the assertions that were made, the documents that were presented and the arguments that were put for war against Iraq, and the reality of what has happened since?

Mr. Straw: What I said is what I said. My hon. Friend needs to apply himself to the basis on which the House voted, after intense debate and a period of consideration going back for eight months. Yes, we did speak about the need to disarm Saddam Hussein of his weapons of mass destruction. So did the Security Council. It was not a hole-in-the-corner thing, as is sometimes implied, all depending on whether it took 45 minutes or 90 minutes for those weapons to be prepared. It was on the basis of the clearest possible evidence of two key sets of facts: in the words of the United Nations Security Council, Iraq's proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the fact that it had had such programmes and was plainly seeking to rebuild them, and above all its defiance of the will of the United Nations. I say to my hon. Friend and the House—and this underlines the nature of the argument back in March—that had Saddam Hussein complied completely, immediately and fully with the terms of 1441, and had the inspectors been able to say that, there would have been no basis for military action. It was Iraq's wilful failure to comply that was at the heart of the decision that the House rightly took on 18 March to take military action.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The Americans have offered $25 million for information leading to the capture of Saddam Hussein, and since then there has been the tape allegedly portraying the dictator. Is there any evidence to suggest that Saddam Hussein is still alive and in Iraq?

Mr. Straw: There is neither proof of life, nor proof of death.

Point of Order

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, of which I have given you notice. On today's Order Paper, in the written ministerial statements there is listed at item 12 an apparently innocuous item entitled, "Publication of the Butterfield Review". Far from being innocuous, this is an extremely important review of a huge VAT scam. As a result of mismanagement and gross negligence, billions of pounds have been lost to the Exchequer and many prosecutions have failed. So immense were those series of frauds that they distorted the balance of payments figures, jeopardising the macro-economic management of the economy. In those circumstances, will you make it clear to Treasury Ministers that such a major report should have been introduced to the House by an oral statement followed by questions?

Mr. Speaker: These matters are for the judgment of Ministers, and the Minister concerned has obviously used his judgment.

National Minimum Wage (Tips)

1.50 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend Regulation 31 of the National Minimum Wage Regulations 1999 so that amounts paid by customers by way of service charge, tip, gratuity or cover charge whether paid to employees through the payroll or by any other method are excluded from payments taken into account as remunerations contributing to the National Minimum Wage.

I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe), for his invitation to have a meeting on this issue, and his predecessor, now the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, for continuing to encourage me to explore the problems that exist with regard to the national minimum wage and tips.

The question is: when a customer gives a tip, who is it for? Customers, and I think all hon. Members, believe that a tip is for the individual waiter or hotel staff member whom they give it to or leave it for or that it will be shared through a pooled tip system—we would call such a pool a kitty in Scotland, but it is officially called a tronc—to be shared among the staff. Customers believe that in the UK, where we have a national minimum wage by law—I think that, at £4.10, it is still too low, but it will be increased to £4.50 in October—the tip will make a small addition to that sum. It will not do so if it is paid on a credit card, in a cheque, through a pooled system or tronc and through the payroll. Even if a customer gives cash, if the hotel or restaurant runs a tronc or pooled tip system divided up by a tronc master, who tends to be the head waiter—I was told this morning about a headwaiter who took 80 per cent. of all the tips before distributing the rest—it may still be used to pay towards the minimum wage.

I often hear people say "It wasn't meant to be like this"—I use the phrase myself sometimes when I look at Government policy—but it was. In the National Minimum Wage Regulations 1999, regulation 31(1)(e) states that

"service charge, tips, gratuities or cover charge that is not paid through the payroll",

are excluded from payments towards the minimum wage, but that means that other tips are counted towards it. The consequences for 1.8 million people working in the service industry, 67 per cent of whom are women and 40 per cent. of whom are under 25, are significant: some 1.8 million people may not be getting what they think they should get.

The problem was highlighted in the case of Nerva and others *v.* RL&G Ltd., which involved two London restaurants—Paradiso e Inferno in the Strand and Trota Blu in Leicester square. The case was brought in 1995, before the national minimum wage was introduced, but was concluded only last year at the European Court of Human Rights. The High Court ruling said that

"ownership of tips through cheque and credit card first passes to the employer",

as such payments will be made in the name of the establishment. That was incorporated into the National Minimum Wage Act 1998 and the 1999 regulations. The case of Nerva and others *v.* the UK was lost in 2002 at

the European Court of Human Rights because we had written that injustice into the law of this land. That is why it was thrown out.

An excellent article by Philip Inman in *The Guardian* on Saturday 24 November 2001 revealed that even cash tips are not going to staff. It said that, if the establishment in question operated a tronc or pooled tip system paid through the payroll, it did not go to the staff on top of their minimum wage. The article cited the example of the Sanderson, a well-known London hotel where rooms cost from £240 to £2,000 a night for the main suite. That hotel paid £2.50 an hour and topped up the amount to the minimum wage from tips through the payroll. Popular restaurant chains such as Caffe Uno and Garfunkels operate the same tronc system.

This Bill would ensure that all additional payments made by customers as tips, gratuities, service or cover charges have to be paid in addition to the minimum wage by excluding tips paid by any method from minimum wage calculations. It would also reduce the complexity of enforcement, because, as I told the former Minister, enforcement officers would not have to find out whether tips are paid towards the minimum wage. Everyone working in an establishment would receive the minimum wage. Tips above that would be a matter for them, the tax office and their employer.

The Bill would deliver the guaranteed national minimum wage for the 1.8 million people who are probably the most vulnerable workers in this nation, as was the Labour's Government's intention when they said that they would introduce the original Bill. It would ensure that, when tips are paid and by whatever method, they are for the staff as a little extra for themselves and not their employer.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Michael Connarty, Jim Dobbin, John Robertson, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Vera Baird, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Mr. Parmjit Dhanda, Mr. Bill Tynan, Mr. Jimmy Hood, Linda Gilroy, Mr. Bob Blizzard and Angela Eagle.

NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE (TIPS)

Mr. Michael Connarty accordingly presented a Bill to amend Regulation 31 of the National Minimum Wage Regulations 1999 so that amounts paid by customers by way of service charge, tip, gratuity or cover charge whether paid to employees through the payroll or by any other method are excluded from payments taken into account as remunerations contributing to the National Minimum Wage: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 November, and to be printed [Bill 150].

1.56 pm

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the list of written ministerial statements to be made today, No. 29 will be in the name of the Home Secretary, which is why I refer to it now, while he is in his place. Its title is "Independent Review of the National Asylum Support Service". My understanding is that the independent review has not been published and that only a summary has been issued. My further understanding is that that is so because it is a critical report. May I ask you to reflect on whether it is appropriate that independent review reports are published only in summary form without hon. Members being able to see the full report, which is what was expected and what was implied in the statement?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was in his place when Mr. Speaker dealt with a similar point of order raised by one of his hon. Friends. What Mr. Speaker said I shall say again: this is entirely a matter for the Government, but the hon. Gentleman's concern can be pursued subsequently through question and debate.

Orders of the Day

Sexual Offences Bill *[Lords]*

[Relevant documents: Seventh and Twelfth Reports from the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Session 2002–03, on its continuing scrutiny of Bills, HC 547 and HC 765; and Fifth Report from the Home Affairs Committee, Session 2002–03, on the Sexual Offences Bill, HC 639.]

Order for Second Reading read.

1.58 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I thank not only my noble Friends in the Lords, but all those of all parties and none who contributed to the debate and the improvement of the Bill as it made its way through the upper Chamber. The Bill has been a long time in the making. Both actions against sex offenders and the law on sex offences are outdated and arcane, and are sometimes subject, I regret to say, to a great deal of silliness. That is why Governments of all persuasions have for so long been reluctant to act on some of these measures.

Consultation on the paper "Setting the Boundaries" and the preparation for the Bill lasted two and a half years. The process was worth it in the sense that getting the balance right has been critical to winning over support and finding a consensus. I hope that this House will continue to address the issues rationally and with a view to finding an agreed solution to some of the more difficult problems. All those who have addressed the matter have found that one solution often leads to another difficulty. I therefore hope that we can continue that consensus this afternoon and in Committee. I offer to the Opposition parties the opportunity to continue in Committee that process of dialogue and improvement.

I want to thank once again the members of the taskforce on child protection on the internet for their work. Important work remains to be done on getting the sentencing policy right.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): I am grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way. He is aware of the case of my constituent Shevaun Pennington, who went missing on Saturday and is believed to have travelled to France with a US citizen. That worrying case emphasises why the measures in clause 17 are so necessary, but her safe and immediate return to this country is of course our immediate concern. Would the Home Secretary today contact his French counterparts, not only to thank them for their help to date, but to ask them to do everything else within their power to facilitate that, including providing all necessary information to the Greater Manchester police to help them with their inquiries, publicising media photographs and ensuring that immigration staff at entry and exit points have all the necessary information? Would he further ask his officials to work with Interpol to ensure that information is spread as far and wide as possible to the authorities of neighbouring countries?

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that issue; I will deal with it now. Clause 17 and clauses 121 to 127 strengthen the law substantially in that respect.

On behalf of the House, I send our deepest sympathy to the family of Shevaun. It must be a very trying time for them. No parent who knows and understands that their child will enter and use the internet does not sympathise with them greatly as regards what has happened and the way in which it happened. My office has been in touch with the office of Nicolas Sarkozy, the Minister for the Interior in France, and we have secured agreement from him that the French will take every possible step to assist in apprehending the couples who flew into Paris on Saturday evening. They will engage with our forces—two members of the Greater Manchester police are going out to Paris to assist with the investigation—and work with us through Europol and Interpol to ensure that we follow every possible lead.

On 5 May, in Paris, we had a home affairs meeting of the G8 countries that was led by the French. They were concerned that we should discuss the whole issue of child pornography, grooming on the internet and the use of the internet for such crime. It was agreed then, two months ago, that we should step up joint international action. This case provides an opportunity for people to put into practice their words and intentions. The Foreign Secretary and I want to use every avenue that is available to us in relation to the incident, which reinforces why the measures in clause 17 and the clauses in part 2 relating to enforcement are long overdue and matter so greatly. Apart from fitting into the broader context of strengthening the law and sentencing, they underline the importance of working with the industry on the protections that the taskforce considered and of working together to protect young people from gross abuse.

The signals that we send in today's debate and in Committee will make a difference in terms of the messages that young people receive, the measured way in which we deal with the wider issues of offending and offences, and the engagement of broader civil society in being part of the solution. It is important to take cognisance of the great difficulty of balancing protection against a free and open society. As with so many of the issues that Home Secretaries—as opposed to *Guardian* columnists—have to deal with, such balances must be kept in view all the time.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I place on record my appreciation of the work that my right hon. Friend has done in introducing this very important Bill, which is indeed long overdue.

The Family Planning Association and the Joint Committee on Human Rights have expressed concern that the Bill could criminalise young people of 14 or 15 for consensual petting or kissing. I would be grateful if my right hon. Friend could clarify that, bearing in mind that the average age of first intercourse is now 16. Has he considered the possible implications?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I have. As recently as yesterday I thought about whether there was a formulation that would change the existing law in a way that addressed the practical issues. As the House of Lords found, and as the Committee in this House will find, it is extremely difficult to come up with a formulation that not only protects young people from those over the age of 16 or 18 engaging in activity preparatory to sexual behaviour

that would put them at risk and is considered in the Bill to be unacceptable, and therefore outside the law, but from those under 16—we have all had experience of this in terms of school exclusions—who have taken equally unacceptable actions against those of a similar age. Drawing the line between penetration—we are going to be dealing with these issues, I am afraid—and actions leading to penetration by those intent on doing so without consent has made it impossible to find another definition, given the well-known difficulty of ascertaining consent in relation to youngsters.

The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Mr. Goggins), will meet the head of the Family Planning Association tomorrow. I repeat what I said to several groups who raised civil liberties issues in relation to the recommendations of the taskforce. If the people to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) has been speaking are of good will—as he certainly is—and believe that we have got it wrong, I ask only one thing of them: that they produce a formulation that overcomes the objections that have been raised. It is extremely difficult. I do not want the law to be an ass. No one will be prosecuted in the circumstances outlined by my hon. Friend—they never have been, and they will not be—but to find a way out of a situation that relies on the common sense of the Crown Prosecution Service has proved impossible.

It would be appropriate for me to take offenders first, so I shall deal with part 2, which starts with clauses 81 to 93. That part of the Bill concerns the registration of offenders and updates the existing law, including the Sex Offenders Act 1997. It is about informing the police of changes of circumstance; visits that are to be made by those who are placed on the register; the confirmation every year of the details and whereabouts of those individuals, instead of the present situation; the power regularly to take biometric information, such as fingerprints and photographs; new laws concerning overseas visits and the requirements of notification orders; and, as is described in clauses 95 to 101, getting a grip of those who go overseas to procure the services of young children and monitoring them to prevent them from doing so.

Clauses 102 to 111 bring together sex offenders orders and restraining orders into the new prevention orders, which aim to prevent offenders from going near, or being around, areas such as playgrounds or schools or visiting particular localities. They also deal with the breach of orders and an extension to violent offenders who previously were not dealt with under the relevant provisions. We are also increasing the sentence for such breaches to five years. I am sure that that will send a much better signal.

Clauses 112 to 120 again deal with foreign travel and the need to bring our laws into line. When I responded to the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), I mentioned the way in which clause 17 interchanges with clauses 121 to 127, and risk assessment. The taskforce did an excellent job of considering the matter and dealing with chat rooms. That was one of the most difficult issues because it involves the modern phenomenon of using the internet and access to the internet in a way that it is hard for parents to monitor. We need to ensure that servers provide some protection, but how can that be done in a free and open society? The difficulties are illustrated by the tragedy that has befallen Shevaun, who was taken away by someone who pretended to be a similar age.

However, we are tightening the law to deal with people who endeavour to meet a child following sexual grooming and we therefore need a new offence. We are introducing such an offence today and providing for a penalty when such meetings are intended to lead to a sexual offence against the child at that or a subsequent meeting, and the perpetrator has communicated with the child at least twice to start the grooming process. The offence carries a maximum penalty of five years, but it needs to be linked with the other offences in the Bill that carry much more substantial sentences, including anything that may have happened as a result of the grooming.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The Liberal Democrats support the Government's proposals on grooming and dealing with sex offenders and their registration and monitoring. Like the Government, we stop short of supporting the full implications of a "Sarah's law" approach. Is the Home Secretary satisfied that, when British people or those resident in Britain commit sex offences abroad, information about the conviction will be adequately transferred to the authorities on all occasions so that we are protected against those who have offended abroad but return to this country and are obviously at risk of offending here?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall answer the question carefully because my immediate instinct is to say yes, but much depends on the jurisdiction in which the offence takes place and its ability to deal with such matters through its criminal justice system. Whenever such actions are identified, I expect the relevant countries to be required to ensure that they inform us properly, just as we would want to do the same when offenders commit crimes in this country. I am happy to explore in Committee whether we might take further measures to ensure that the process is watertight.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I, too, welcome the provisions on sexual grooming. As the Home Secretary knows, the Conservative party said some time ago that the matter required attention. Is he satisfied that there is enough flexibility in the proposed maximum sentence to deal with cases in which nothing else happens, but the evidence is clear and unequivocal about the intent of a person, who may have previous convictions for serious sex offences against children?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes. Earlier, I said that we must be able to judge the sentencing provisions that are available to the judiciary in the light of the variation in offences. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have done that with respect to variation in age of the offender. The Bill now provides for that, as does the Criminal Justice Bill. My hon. Friend Baroness Scotland will raise the matter in the House of Lords when it considers the Criminal Justice Bill. She is prepared to listen to the comments of hon. Members here and in another place about other forms of offence and the shadow Home Secretary's

[Mr. Blunkett]

request for a sliding scale for youngsters. However, I am satisfied that we can get tough enough with individuals to the extent of imposing life sentences for some actions.

Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): I understood the point of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) to be that grooming offences do not carry the same maximum penalty, even against children under 13. A person could therefore get a life sentence for committing an offence against a child under 13, but not for grooming such a child. That is an important matter.

Mr. Blunkett: A person cannot get a life sentence for grooming but the actions that arise out of grooming can mean such a sentence. We are criminalising grooming; we are making it an offence with a penalty of five years. For the first time, other actions against children under 13 that arise out of grooming mean a life sentence and 14 years when committed against those who are older than 13. We are trying to make sense of things so that, for the first time, there is an offence that leads to another offence, should that tragically happen.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): Does the Home Secretary acknowledge now—it was acknowledged in the previous Session—that the Bill is proactive not reactive? The hon. Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford) was therefore right. We should strike hard proactively rather than reactively to save a child.

Mr. Blunkett: First, I thank the hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) for the enormous amount of work that he has undertaken as a member of the taskforce and beyond that. We must send the right signals, but hon. Members often draw attention, sometimes when criticising my actions, to the need for penalties to be incremental and to deal with the offence. Our criminal justice system must deal with the offence that has been committed. I should be happy to listen to further thoughts from the hon. Gentleman on the way to get the matter right and on whether I misinterpreted him.

Before I deal in detail with the substance of part 1, I want to lighten the mood by showing the reasons for the reluctance of Governments of all persuasions to deal with such issues and the difficulty of tackling them in practice. I draw on the debate in the House of Lords for examples.

Simon Hughes: It is hilarious.

Mr. Blunkett: I need to lighten my mood because going through some of the cases is harrowing.

Some of the comments that were made could have come from "Round the Horne" and "Beyond Our Ken". Let us take Lady Saltoun—or Opposition Members can take her. Between her more offensive comments, she came out with some gems. Her statements are almost priceless. She suggested that oral penetration could be considered less serious on the ground that it could be prevented because:

"Clenched teeth can provide quite a good defence. Indeed, not only can they provide a good line of defence, they can be an aggressive form of defence because teeth can also bite."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 31 March 2003; Vol. 646, c. 1054.]

How could one disagree with such a gem? Lady Noakes also came out with a real classic when she described as a "probing amendment" a proposal to

"leave out 'genitals' and insert 'penis'."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 19 May 2003; Vol. 648, c. 555.]

The good news is that she withdrew it. I hope that the Committee will restrain itself when it reaches these parts of the Bill, but these examples demonstrate the pitfalls that we can all encounter. These are deeply difficult areas, and it is a tribute to the way in which the Bill has been handled that we have got this far. I hope that the Committee will be able to continue that process.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): On the lighter points of the Bill, the Home Secretary might not have read all the evidence given to the Home Affairs Committee, on which I serve. One of the highlights was when the head of the naturists pointed out that all naturists had to carry a naturist passport, which led many members of the Committee to wonder where they would keep it.

Mr. Blunkett: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall move quickly on from contemplating that thought—sufficient unto the day.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): Where would they keep their identity cards?

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) makes me smile by asking that question. Perhaps the biometric data could be placed on the person.

Clauses 1, 3, 4 and 5 provide for clarity and greater strength in dealing with the law on consent. The definition of consent has been a difficult and problematic issue. In the House of Lords, we managed, through agreement and compromise, to ensure that consent had to be freely given, and that the test of reasonableness was accepted in terms of the genuine belief that consent existed. I am glad that we reached such a compromise because it was important that we were able to move forward in that way. In the Lords, we discussed the question of a list of offences involving a presumption, and we shall return to that in Committee. This involves circumstances in which the lack of consent is self-evident, including those in which someone was asleep or had been drugged or rendered unconscious. Clearly, it would be self-evident that they could not have given their consent in such circumstances. We will be happy to hear from Members on both sides of the House regarding how we can build on the progress that has been made and move forward in those areas. Honest and reasonable belief in relation to consent seems to be a sensible agreed solution.

Clause 2 deals with the difficult issue of anonymity, and a new clause relating to the definition of this was narrowly carried in the House of Lords. As drafted, it applies only post-charge, but as we all know, the difficult with anonymity often arises when there is speculation about what has happened and about the nature of an individual's activities, long before charges are brought. I have said before that we are not convinced that we can separate anonymity in such circumstances from anonymity in relation to other very serious offences, but we remain willing to listen to the

views put forward in Committee. It is our intention at the moment to ask the Committee to reverse that amendment.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way on this rather difficult issue, and I hope that the Committee will have time to consider it in more detail. Clearly there is a problem when, for example, a professional person such as a doctor has been accused of inappropriate behaviour and the matter goes to court. Once that person has been charged, his name will be besmirched by all sorts of newspapers – scurrilous and otherwise – which will do irreparable damage to his reputation, even if he is subsequently found innocent. Will my right hon. Friend consider those difficult situations in which a professional person who is accused of something that he is subsequently found not to have done, nevertheless has significant damage done to his reputation by the reporting of the case in the newspapers?

Mr. Blunkett: This is precisely the area in which we have to be very cautious. We are talking to the Association of Chief Police Officers and to the newspaper industry about strengthening the existing guidelines to protect individuals. We would need anonymity not only all the way through the criminal process but all the way through the professional process. In the instance that my hon. Friend has given, that would obviously involve hearings before the General Medical Council, because there would be professional concerns involved, and a judgment would have to made in relation to the knowledge of patients in those circumstances.

Mr. Grieve: I recognise that this is an area of considerable difficulty for the Home Secretary. I note that he highlighted the differences between anonymity pre-charge and during the trial process. I also noted his view that there might be an argument for tightening up the rules on pre-charge publicity and anonymity. One problem is that, all too often, there is evidence that the police collude with the media to reveal information on those who are under investigation, when there is no justification whatever for them to do so.

Mr. Blunkett: I am not going to enter into the vigorous debate that took place in the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport a couple of months ago. Historically, however, people have believed that information has rapidly been passed to newspapers by those who should know better. There is no point in trying to duck that issue. In consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers, representatives of the newspaper industry and others, we need to examine how we can get some sense in this context, because it is an affront to the rights of an individual if they are named and their reputation is sullied in circumstances in which there is no evidence against them.

Vera Baird (Redcar): Is not the anonymity issue one for the criminal justice system as a whole, across many offences? I doubt that it would be worse for someone to be named in connection with an allegation of a sexual offence than with an allegation that they had robbed an old lady of 80 and seriously injured her, or an allegation that they were a murderer. I doubt that there is any gravity that requires special protection in relation to sexual offences.

Before my right hon. Friend rises to respond, may I make one more point? Clause 2, as drafted, states:

"The defendant in rape etc. cases shall enjoy the same right to anonymity as is enjoyed by the complainant."

As I recall, the right to anonymity of a complainant is lifelong. This provision would therefore mean that a defendant would be entitled to anonymity even after conviction.

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. and learned Friend has drawn attention to the flawed drafting of the clause, which needs to be considered very carefully. I agree with her first point, which is that a whole range of offences that do not have anonymity attached to them cause grave concern to individuals, not just those with public standing or a professional reputation, but people in general who find themselves in such circumstances. That is why there is a need for a great deal more care to be taken when reporting takes place in this context, as well as a need to address this specific issue.

Clauses 6, 7, 8 and 9 deal with the age below which there should be no question of a child being presumed to have consented to sex. This measure is long overdue, and I am glad that we have been able to reach agreement on it. It will ensure that those aged 12 and under cannot give and should not ever be presumed to give consent. I am pleased that we have been able to make common sense out of this.

Clauses 10 to 16 cover both direct physical activity and the kind of action that was highlighted last year that leads youngsters to be brought into a situation in which, although they are not being physically abused, they are being encouraged to take off their clothes and engage in other activities that are totally unacceptable. We obviously have to ensure that youngsters are protected from such activities, and I am glad that we have reached agreement there. As mentioned a few moments ago, differential penalties also apply in these clauses in respect of different ages.

Vera Baird: Am I right in understanding that, for an offence under clause 10, which outlaws sexual activity with someone under 16, no defence of consent applies? If, however, someone under 16 is raped under clause 1, does the defence of consent still apply? I assume that it does, so I do not follow the line of logic that separates the two.

Mr. Blunkett: I will happily come back to my hon. and learned Friend if I inadvertently misled her or the House, but it is not our intention that that should be the case, and if the drafting is inadequate, we will certainly put it right in Committee.

Clause 17 was referred to earlier, together with clauses 121 and 127, in the context of grooming. Clauses 18 to 26 are about the re-enactment and extension of the law covering 16 and 17-year-olds. In other words, 16 and 17-year-olds are brought under the provisions on trust, where professionals hold positions of trust in a range of circumstances and we need to ensure that young people

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are protected. Children's guardians and those responsible for discharging care or supervision orders would fall under those provisions.

Clauses 27 to 31 deal with abuse within the family, replacing the current law on incest with children. Again, the issue is about dealing with those who have and gain the trust of young people, and relevant provisions are extended to 16 and 17-year-olds.

Clauses 32 to 46 deal with the difficult area of offences against adults with learning disabilities or with mental health disorders. That is an area of substantial abuse and it again includes people in a position of authority. It is estimated that those with learning disabilities are three times as likely to have been abused than other members of the population. We face grave difficulties in securing credible evidence from the individuals affected. Many people within and outside the House are deeply concerned, and we are very happy to be able to move forward on that front.

Mr. Grieve: I agree with everything that the Home Secretary has just said. It was brought to my attention—and probably to his, and it may need to be dealt with carefully in Committee—by care workers who deal with learning disabilities, that certain areas of sex education pose peculiar problems for them. They are afraid of being exposed to prosecution on account of the way in which they deliver such education. I hope that the Home Secretary will be open-minded about that when we come to deal with this extremely difficult area in Committee.

Mr. Blunkett: Yes. In fact, clauses 47 and 48 deal with some of the difficulties faced by law enforcement agencies in replicating photographs. That fits into a similar category, where we do not wish to prevent professionals from doing their job of providing advice, support and help. The police obviously need to use certain material in order to obtain a conviction. On either front, I am happy for us to debate how best to ensure that people can get on with their jobs free from the fear of unwarranted prosecution—or even allegations, which would probably be more relevant, because the Crown Prosecution Service, as we mentioned at the start of the debate, is likely to use common sense in these matters.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I would like to probe the Home Secretary further on the question of the marriage exemption, particularly in respect of the abuse of trust. An exemption for marriage exists for relationships between people who are 16 and 17 and older people. Being married obviously provides a defence. However, does that not create a difficulty in being discriminatory, since marriage is available as a defence only in heterosexual relationships? Parental consent is required in that case, so is there not an argument for exploring whether obtaining parental consent for relationships in those narrowly defined areas could be a way of ensuring that homosexual relationships of the same depth and strength as married heterosexual relationships are available to provide the same protection? I realise that it is a difficult area, but I would be grateful if the Home Secretary would at least allow that issue to be explored.

Mr. Blunkett: It is probably the first time in six years of being in the Government that I have said it, but I do wish the hon. Gentleman had given me notice of that question. The sensible thing would be for me to write to him. I would also be happy for the hon. Gentleman to meet the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Mr. Goggins) to discuss the matter. I have not dealt with it so far in my discussions on the Bill over recent months, but I shall certainly take what the hon. Gentleman said seriously.

Clauses 49 to 61 deal with commercial exploitation for sexual purposes. The provisions are long overdue and in common with subsequent clauses complement our work on the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, which dealt with trafficking across the world. The clauses deal with the difficult issues surrounding prostitution. I spoke, together with the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), who has responsibility for drugs and organised crime, at a recent conference in Leeds, at which parents of children who had been inveigled into prostitution appealed to us to move rapidly and extensively to prevent that massive exploitation. The difficulties of prosecution have been made worse by the need to protect children and the fact that the provision will now include 16 and 17-year-olds. It was rightly pointed out that some youngsters drawn into this activity at 14 and 15 had somehow been left to their own devices at 16 and 17, which is a travesty. We should extend the law, whether on pornography or prostitution, to make it easier to take decisive action to protect people against exploitation for commercial gain.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and I commend him for introducing this important legislation. Can he confirm that we have now reached the moment when it is possible to say that children who have been involved in prostitution or pornography are removed from any criminal liability whatever?

Mr. Blunkett: Children are, and the intent behind the clauses is to get round the difficulty that in the past it had to be proved that the person exploiting the child did so for material gain. That was much more difficult to prove than the suspicion itself. We are now removing that difficulty and we are also for the first time criminalising the payer for sex with a child. Amazingly, that was not in itself a criminal offence. As I made clear earlier, the penalty where children under 13 are concerned will be life, and it will be 14 years for similar offences with older children. That sends out a clear signal.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): The clauses on trafficking are welcome, but they are the only clauses in the Bill where no distinction is made in recognition of the fact that the victim could be a child. UNICEF raised the issue with me and, no doubt, other hon. Members. What is the Home Secretary's logic for failing to make

a distinction for where the victim is a child? Surely the seriousness of cases involving children should be reflected in the Bill.

Mr. Blunkett: As I argued earlier, it is possible for someone to be charged with more than one offence. The penalties levied would be commensurate with the combined offence. I am sure that my hon. Friends would be happy to consider in Committee whether, when trafficking offences that apply to adults as well as children are combined with offences involving children to which certain penalties would apply independently the penalties are sufficient to reflect the heinousness of the offence of trafficking in young people. In other words, if we determine that combining the offences is not enough, we need to decide whether the aggravation of the offence should carry additional penalties. My ministerial colleagues will take a look at that matter in Standing Committee.

In fact, the Standing Committee process will ensure that an improved Bill comes back to the House. The Government will listen and respond, as we do not pretend to have the handle on everything or to be the fount of all wisdom. We do on some occasions, but not on this matter. For the information of the House, and of *Hansard*, that last remark was an example of irony.

Clauses 62 to 64 deal with drug rape. I think that the House agrees on this matter. The Bill raises the penalty to 10 years. It is an outrage that people should be abused in that way.

Clauses 65 and 66 are about adult incest, which is another very difficult area.

Clauses 67 to 72 are about sex in public. Now, I want to make it clear that the coverage that has been given to this issue would be impossible to make up. The then Parliamentary Under-Secretary, now the Minister of State, Department for International Development, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Hilary Benn), gave a perfectly reasonable explanation at a press briefing of what was intended. An interesting debate was initiated, which led people to believe that the Bill would reduce rather than strengthen the law in relation to matters such as sex in toilets.

I want to make it absolutely clear that sex in toilets is illegal. It will remain so. The offence will be enforceable under existing public order legislation, but there will be additional protection as well. Given the confusion, I do not intend to remove the amendment passed in the House of Lords. Instead, I shall seek to ensure that it is operable and that it makes sense. I invite Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members to ensure that we get the matter right, as no one wants any form of sex to be taking place around them in a toilet, whether in or out of a cubicle. That goes for petting as much as for more unacceptable forms of behaviour. I doubt whether any hon. Member would disagree with that.

Mr. Grieve: What the Home Secretary has just said is extremely welcome. There are a number of ways in which to tackle the problem. The right hon. Gentleman has plainly taken on board the concerns expressed in another place and I am sure that we can arrive at a satisfactory formula on which we can all agree.

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. That indicates that common sense will be applied in common cause.

Simon Hughes: I have spoken to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) about this matter. Like Conservative Members, the Liberal Democrats are very keen to sort this matter out once and for all. The wording of clause 67 is not right yet, so will the Home Secretary look at the proposal from the Home Affairs Committee that the public order legislation should be amended and clarified? I am very tempted by the idea of making the activity a public order offence. I share the Home Secretary's objective absolutely, but there may be a way to achieve it by means of the Criminal Justice Bill rather than this Bill.

Mr. Blunkett: The point about the interplay between the Criminal Justice Bill and this Bill is important. I have spoken in strong terms about the potential for incorporating the common law in statute law. I am very happy to continue to explore that. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary has spent more hours than he cares to reveal looking for a way forward on this matter to which hon. Members of all parties can agree. We all want a lasting rather than a temporary solution.

The Bill contains a number of clauses dealing with bestiality. I do not intend to go into them this afternoon. The House of Lords did so at considerable depth, so I shall spare hon. Members details of the activities involved.

Before concluding, I want to say that the spirit in which the proposals have been received shows that every hon. Member wants there to be lasting legislation in this area. Over the past century, securing change in respect of some matters has taken a long time. We want the legislation to last, but we also know that the law is not sufficient. Changing the law is important, as are the penalties set down and the signals given out, but we must also change the way people live their lives. We are dealing with matters such as how young people are brought up, how they are educated in schools, and how they come to understand what is acceptable and what is not.

It is also a matter of trying to spot mental health problems at an early age. Some of the activities covered by the Bill can only be carried out by people who are severely mentally ill. They need help at an early stage in their lives, and I hope that we will be able to set the law and carry out those other functions.

Dr. Evan Harris: During debates on the Bill that became the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000, I raised the question of offences that had been decriminalised but in respect of which people were still subject to sex offenders registration and orders. My proposal was rejected at the time by Ministers, but Lord Falconer said in the House of Lords that he was confident that the Government might be able to table an amendment during the Commons stages of this Bill to ensure that work could be done to identify people subject to the sex offenders regime in respect of acts that

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had effectively been decriminalised by the 2000 Act. Those acts included gross indecency offences and age-of-consent offences. Will the Home Secretary give the House an update on his thinking on whether such an amendment will be forthcoming as this Bill goes through the House?

Mr. Blunkett: We are minded to introduce such an amendment, as long as we can find a way around the difficulties associated with consensual sex in terms of the position in which people find themselves historically. That is the really difficult challenge, as the hon. Gentleman will know from his work on this matter. We have to trawl back and ensure that an act was consensual. We have given an undertaking to those who have approached us that we will try and find a way forward on this matter. The change in the law means that it would be quite wrong for people to be registered as guilty for an act that is no longer a crime.

The cross-party and no-party task force to which I referred earlier has been very helpful. We intend to set up a new, cross-Government ministerial committee to monitor the implementation of the legislation and associated measures. It will also look at prevention, early intervention and support, so that we can get the matter right across the piece. That would apply to issues to do with rape, for instance. We intend to set up a rape helpline as quickly as possible, as we promised in an earlier debate.

Given the discussion this afternoon, and the content of the Bill, I hope that we can all go forward

Mr. Dawson: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: My goodness! I will give way, but only because my hon. Friend has a privileged position on the all-party committee.

Mr. Dawson: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend, and I welcome the new ministerial group on sexual offending. Will he confirm that it will look at the treatment of sex offenders? Well-developed models now exist for addressing the dangerous and abusive offending behaviour of adults. If we provide the means for people to be treated, we can protect children.

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, it is precisely because we need to take non-legislative measures for prevention and early intervention that the group will be looking at the matters that my hon. Friend has set out. I am sure that hon. Members of all parties will join me in appealing to the press to understand that it is better, and safer for the public, to treat someone than to leave that person untreated and unsupported on a register. Such a person is in danger of committing sexual offences again. Treatment has to be the right approach, although it is always difficult to find locations that will not offend local residents, or make them feel threatened. We all understand that because we are all constituency MPs, which is a great strength of this House.

Before anyone else intervenes, I commend the Bill to the House.

2.50 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I welcome the way in which the Home Secretary opened the debate and presented this matter to the House. I disagreed with his position only when he provided his own analysis of the pitfalls that may have beset those in another place, including my hon. Friends and the Baroness Noakes, in particular, when they presented the various matters to the Lords. There may be a tendency to squeamishness in this place. No one is more capable of robust humour than my noble Friend. In those circumstances, to think of her comments as an unintended pitfall may do her less than justice. As I found in my days as a law student, one need only go to the law reports to the case of R. *v.* Collins, which fell open at the page describing what constituted an effective and substantial entry for the purposes of committing burglary with intent to rape because of the number of times that it had been read, and which caused general hilarity because the facts of the case were so bizarre. On what is a sombre matter, the Home Secretary should forgive my noble Friend for introducing a note of hilarity to the proceedings, which we sometimes badly need.

One of the key features of the Bill is the extent to which it has been improved in the other place. When it was first published, the key definitions in clauses 1, 76 and 77 of what constitutes rape and how it should be proved gave me serious cause for concern. I feared that there would be a substantial issue of principle between both sides of the House and perhaps between individuals as the Bill proceeded. I feared that changing the presumptions and changing the test for consent from an objective to a subjective test would cause us real problems. I am happy to be able to say that those problems have evaporated. The way the Lords approached the matter and applied their expertise to a particularly difficult problem, as well as the fact that we have maintained the presumptions but made them evidential and not probative, have made a substantial difference to preserving proper civil rights and fairness in trials while bringing about changes that were long overdue.

I have never understood the subjective test in rape. Indeed, I suspect that few jurors understood it either. I do not know whether the changes will make a significant difference, but I am content that they will provide an objective test of whether consent has been provided.

Mr. Cameron: Does my hon. Friend have any concerns about the fact that while the other place has done a great tidying-up job, in particular with clauses 75 and 76 on consent, those provisions are still complex and will still require the judge to lead the jury through complicated legal hoops when what really should be at issue is putting the facts before the open court?

Mr. Grieve: My hon. Friend makes an important point. A number of judges have told me that they remain concerned about how they will sum up a case properly to the jury on the new tests. The old tests had the merit of considerable simplicity. That said, that task is not necessarily impossible. My field of practice, which was far removed from this area of the law, although I did deal with it, was health and safety at work, where there are precise reversals of the burden of proof in certain areas. I have not normally seen it as a great difficulty for

the judge to explain that to members of the jury in a way that is fair to the defendant and enables the jury to understand. I certainly undertake that we will not allow this key matter to pass through the Committee without further consideration.

Vera Baird: The hon. Gentleman referred to clause 76, which seems to have been simplified considerably in the other place. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary referred to the reverse presumptions coming into play if a person had been drugged. The only situation that is almost akin to that in clause 76 is that those presumptions come into play when a complainant is asleep or otherwise unconscious at the time of the sex act. Some rape drugs do not make a person unconscious; they paralyse or stupefy them. Given that the offence of administering such a rape drug is included in the Bill in clause 62, does the hon. Gentleman think that it would be a good idea to say that the presumptions in clause 76 should apply where such a drug has been administered?

Mr. Grieve: The hon. and learned Lady makes an important point. The short answer is that that is precisely the sort of matter we must consider in some detail in Committee. It would be foolish of me to attempt to go into such detail in a Second Reading debate. I accept that there are areas in which the legislation could be improved. We should not say that we are satisfied until the Bill has cleared all its stages in this House. I will be happy to look into that aspect of it.

I do not wish to survey the Bill in its entirety as the Home Secretary did—it is not necessary and would take up too much time—but I shall highlight one or two areas that still need some attention. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned naturists and their concerns about the exposure offences and the offence of voyeurism in clause 69. Although the other place seems to have dealt satisfactorily with exposure, naturists' concerns about what might constitute voyeurism, which might interfere with their legitimate activities, bears some consideration owing to the odd use of the word "structure" in that clause. If naturists decide to go into a garden behind a high wall where they are invisible from any surrounding buildings or any person and someone puts a ladder against the wall and climbs it to photograph them, are the naturists protected by the definition of "structure"? That may be an area in which we can improve the legislation. It seems to me that the term "structure" might protect them only if it refers to a building.

The Home Secretary mentioned sex in public lavatories and I do not need to say any more about that in view of his helpful comments. However, on the principle behind this, which I think he accepts, the concern expressed in the other place was not homophobic. From experience at the Bar, I know of a number of cases involving heterosexual activities in public lavatories that are as antisocial and unpleasant in every way as any other form of activity. I put that on the record because concern has been expressed that the provision was an expression of a return to homophobic fears; it is not.

The Home Secretary rightly highlighted recent worrying events in relation to sexual grooming. I join him in expressing sympathy to Shevaun's family and I hope that she may soon be reunited with them. The Home Secretary may have slightly misunderstood the point that I was trying to make. I apologise, as I may not have been as clear as I should have been. I think that a seven-year sentence is provided for in the Bill, not five as the Home Secretary said. Whether it is seven years or five, the point at issue is that, in a sexual grooming case, the person arrested may not have had the opportunity to commit any of the other offences set out in the measure. In those circumstances, if the intervention was rapid enough, people would breath a sigh of relief.

If there is no more to the matter than that, I accept that the seven-year sentence might be appropriate, but if someone is arrested and the evidence of intent for sexual grooming is overwhelming—for example, if he is found in possession of material that is clearly linked to committing a serious sexual offence and he has a past record of having committed such offences—is there sufficient upward flexibility to allow the judge to protect the public from further offences? That is the point that I was trying to make.

Mr. Blunkett: First, the hon. Gentleman is correct to note that the sentence is seven years. I am grateful to him for drawing attention to my mistake.

The hon. Gentleman's second point is valid. I had slightly misinterpreted his remarks. If there is a definable further act that would warrant a much more substantial sentence, the Crown Prosecution Service should bring that charge. I take his point, however: we may need a cumulative way of reflecting the severity of what has been done, in the light of previous convictions for similar offences. I think that is the point that he was making and I have a great deal of sympathy with it.

Mr. Grieve: I am most grateful to the Home Secretary. That, too, is a matter that we can look at constructively in Committee to see whether we can provide some improvements.

Sir Paul Beresford: My hon. Friend might reflect on the recent case of an individual who had no record but arrived at a meeting expecting to buy a 10-year-old girl for sex; he was armed with wire cutters, tape, condoms and all the works. Fortunately, he met a six-foot-something burly Metropolitan policeman, but the crime that he intended to commit could have been taken into account in the sentence.

Mr. Grieve: My hon. Friend makes a good point, which we shall have to consider carefully. At the same time, it is also right that we should not sentence to huge terms of imprisonment people with no track record of having committed an offence, even though some evidence of preparatory intent has been found. The dividing line is difficult to draw. Public protection is important, and I am sure that in Committee, with the help of my hon. Friend, we can make some progress on such issues.

The proposed risk of sexual harm orders are a cause of concern not only to me but to some outside organisations. Although I entirely accept the principle, one must also bear in mind that they could be imposed on people who had never been convicted of any offence whatever, even though that might be unlikely to occur in practice. In those circumstances, the prescribed five-year period seems somewhat draconian. There may be

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greater scope for flexibility in the other direction while still allowing for a maximum period. We hope to be able to look into that matter, especially as there is also a provision for interim orders, which can be obtained quickly.

The Home Secretary has an unenviable task: balancing the need to protect the public with the need to protect the liberties of the individual. I certainly do not criticise him for the way in which the Bill has been put together in respect of those matters. I hope, however, that we can provide further scrutiny of that aspect.

The Home Secretary rightly said that the issue of anonymity goes much further than sexual offences. People's lives can be ruined through having their identity revealed at the time of an investigation, while they can be equally damaged by the trial process. I have noted that commentators have said that there is no equivalence between the alleged victim, who is giving evidence, and the person on trial, but I take a slightly different view.

In this country, the general principle has been that allegations are made openly and that, as a general rule, people stand by them in the sense that they are willing to accept the publicity attendant on making them. Equally, those against whom the allegations are made must suffer the consequences of the trial process, however unpleasant that may be and however difficult if they are subsequently acquitted. We have rightly provided anonymity for victims; if we had not done so, we should be doing a grave disservice to the interests of justice in such cases. The exception that we made for such victims was correct. However, there is another side of the anonymity coin, which relates to the accused, both in the period before a charge is made and thereafter.

The Home Secretary made some interesting comments this afternoon. He seemed to indicate that the Government might be minded to look more generally at the issue pre-charge, across the whole spectrum of offences. That might be one approach, but we should not simply allow an issue that was considered soberly and at great length in the other place to disappear. There is overwhelming evidence that individuals tried for alleged sexual offences frequently suffer disproportionate publicity and, if acquitted, there are serious consequences when they try to rebuild their lives.

For a period of 12 years, we provided for the anonymity of such people. When I was first called to the Bar, that principle still operated and I cannot remember anyone saying that the administration of justice was seriously inconvenienced or handicapped as a result. Mindful as I am of the comments that have been made—that there may be circumstances in which the lack of publicity means that other victims may not come forward—there is an established track record to show that the principle has operated, or appears to have operated, reasonably well in the past. There might be circumstances in which an exception could be made, such as a submission by the prosecutor that the offences were serial and thus that further publicity was required.

Vera Baird: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has noted that if there were to be any such provision, there would have to be exceptions. I was reading an article in a 1986 copy of *The Times* recently, when there was anonymity for rape defendants. One of the problems in a number of cases then was that if such a defendant absconded before he came to trial, no publicity could be used to try to apprehend him.

Mr. Grieve: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for that contribution. I hope that she understands that I accepted that there was an issue, although not one that is necessarily insurmountable. A measure of protection might still be provided.

In relation to the provisions on under-18-year-olds, the Home Secretary pointed out, in some of the final comments in his speech, that some of the problems were related to mental health. The Home Secretary has read the briefing available to other Members and to those who take an interest in the subject. The evidence is pretty overwhelming; in many cases, paedophile behaviour starts in adolescence, in those under the age of 18. If it could be tackled at that age, it could be dealt with successfully, whereas the evidence shows that although it is possible to achieve cures in adulthood, through treatment and rehabilitation, it is much harder.

I am sympathetic to the principle that has led the Home Secretary to place a lot of emphasis on under-age sexual behaviour, including that which may take place between two people who are both under age or very close in age; but the consequences are bizarre in places.

Although the Home Secretary is right to highlight the fact that substantial change to the principle of the law has not been proposed, things appear in a pretty stark light when we end up with five-year penalties for those who go behind the bicycle sheds to engage in some French kissing—that is what it really boils down to even with two 15-year-olds. That is a very odd state of affairs.

Speaking as a Conservative, I have an inherent anxiety about administrative discretion. I accept that administrative discretion may be the only remedy in cases where the CPS will not charge. Nevertheless, when such matters are put on to the statute book in such stark terms, I always fear that, at some point, something will not work properly and that we will end up with prosecutions that cause serious problems. I admit to the Secretary of State that I am not sure that I know the answers, and I suspect that, if he had known the answers, he would have already put them on the statute book.

It is an odd state of affairs—the hon. and learned Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) also highlighted the oddity of the situation in an earlier intervention—that it is possible for someone under the age of 16 to consent to rape, thereby reducing it to the alternative offence, which is a sexual act to which no consent can be given. I think that that is how I read the Bill. So if one has sexual intercourse with a 14-year-old, it may be possible to escape the full penalty of the law, but there is no possibility of that 14-year-old consenting to much lesser behaviour, even though she may consent to the more serious one. That is a curious state of affairs, and all I can say to the Home Secretary is that I shall do my best, as will my hon. Friends, to try to improve on matters, but I am by no means certain that we will be able to do so.

Mr. Blunkett: I make this generous offer: I will buy a flagon of champagne for anyone who comes up with a satisfactory answer. [HON. MEMBERS: "A flagon?"] Not a flagon

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): A magnum.

Mr. Blunkett: Well, those who come from the north of England need civilising, don't they? We will settle for a magnum of champagne. The hon. Gentleman is entirely right: it is an ass, but we have to deal with the ass by providing a carrot, rather than a stick.

Mr. Grieve: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for the offer. I think that a flagon would have suited me very well, but I fear that I may not obtain it. However, he has certainly fired me into finding out whether I can provide any improvement.

I wish to deal with the abuse of positions of trust, about which I have to tell the Home Secretary that there is something rather strange. A schoolmaster who has fallen in love with a 17-year-old pupil is constrained from having sexual relations with her. I have no problem with that whatsoever. People who are in positions of trust must not abuse the trust, otherwise the whole system collapses. Parents are entitled to know that their children will not be abused at school. However, I find it strange that the word "regularly" has been introduced, not so much in relation to the abuse, I hasten to tell the Home Secretary, but in relation to the person's status in an educational establishment.

I find it rather difficult to understand why, if a supply teacher is at a school for only a week, the responsibilities and duties that fall upon him should be any different from those for someone who is there permanently; nor do I understand the downside problem, although it might be necessary to tinker slightly with other words in the relevant clause to ensure that, when that person ceases to teach, the constraints placed on him having a sexual relationship with the 17-year-old are rapidly removed. That is something that we can achieve, and I am not very happy with the way things stand at present.

I mentioned to the Home Secretary the question of those with learning disabilities, and I do not want to go into that further now. We will consider those issues later.

Finally, I wish to refer to a completely separate matter, which does not appear in the Bill, but to which the Government are giving some thought. There is a great deal of evidence that, as well as photographs being taken of children, paedophile pornography consists of other images that may not be of victims, but which are nevertheless very pernicious in their dissemination. The Bill makes no mention of those images, but I understand from correspondence that I have seen that the Home Secretary is alive to that issue and has indicated that he would be minded to consider that matter, while the Bill is considered in the Commons.

Sir Paul Beresford: Will my hon. Friend also consider including in that list the written word because paedophile pornography in the form of the written word is also circulated among those of that inclination?

Mr. Grieve: My hon. Friend raises another very big issue—which, in turn, raises some very big issues in relation to censorship. What is unusual about paedophile pornography is the clear linkage that appears to have been established between the consumption of the pornography and individuals subsequently committing offences. The stirring of the imagination by either works of literature—if that is the right title—or, for that matter, by images is such that it can lead, on a fairly identifiable path, to the commission of offences against children. That is the point, not the suppression of the ordinary exchange of information. That raises a difficult issue.

If the Government wish to consider the written word, we will certainly do so as well, but given that the Home Secretary seems to have given an undertaking to consider the visual image—I suspect from everything that I have seen that it appears to be one of the worst forms of such pornography, but my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) may know much more about such things—we will certainly be sympathetic to that and we will give it close scrutiny in Committee. However, I very much hope that we will have an opportunity to consider it in Committee, rather than at a later stage.

Mr. George Osborne: On the point about the written word, may I caution my hon. Friend that it is a quagmire? In previous generations, people have been dragged into debates about works of literature, such as "Lolita", or works that do not quite qualify as literature, such as those by the Marquis de Sade, and Parliament should not be drawn down that avenue again.

Mr. Grieve: I have great sympathy with my hon. Friend's remarks, and I hope that he noted from my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley that I saw the issue as a possible quagmire, which is why the Home Secretary was not preparing to venture into it. I would probably be happy if he were simply to venture into what is already a bit of a quagmire: the visual image, which already goes much further than taking photographs of under-age children. In fact, it involves images of children who do not exist and are simply the concoction of the imagination. If the Home Secretary thinks that that is a real issue because of the information and evidence that he has been given by experts in the field, the House will have to consider it, and we will provide such assistance as we can in doing so.

I am sure that other parts of the Bill will need to be considered carefully. I have never been involved with a Bill that has attracted more flyers from non-governmental bodies and other organisations on a host of issues, some of which are very interesting, but probably rather peripheral to the matters under consideration, although they may be very worthy. I will certainly try to take up those that appear to be relevant during the consideration of the Bill.

The Home Secretary is to be commended greatly for taking on a difficult task that has certainly been ducked previously. I very much hope that, given the huge measure of agreement on both sides of the House, we can ensure that the Bill leaves the House in very good order.

3.19 pm

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): I am very grateful to have the chance to speak in the debate on this very important Bill, which deals with some very sensitive

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issues that bridge the generation gap and involve changing attitudes to sex and personal relations, which is perhaps partly why the Bill also runs into some difficulties. The Bill includes some welcome and important safeguards for some of the most vulnerable people and updates legislation to deal with new criminal activities, particularly in relation to internet crime, which will surely become increasingly important in the coming years. Some formidable measures are needed to tackle that.

I also welcome very much the range of measures to provide further safeguards for children. Jason Swift, who was one of the unfortunate victims of a notorious paedophile ring some years ago, originally came from my constituency. His family have campaigned vigorously over the years for improvements to the protection of children and had some contact with the Home Office in the preparation of some of this legislation. I very much welcome, too, the changes to honest belief as a defence for rape and the need for this belief to be reasonable, for which my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) has also campaigned strongly, both outside and inside Parliament.

My comments will be focused, however, on clauses 61 to 63 on trafficking, and on the clauses on child pornography and prostitution. Trafficking issues get less attention in the Bill, but from my experience as a constituency MP, and from looking at some of the international development issues, it is a problem that is considerably more extensive than we often assume. That also means that we must consider more protections for the victims of trafficking, particularly children, and perhaps some tighter legal safeguards to protect children from trafficking than are included in this legislation.

In my constituency, there has been a trafficking problem in relation to both women and children. At one of my first advice surgeries after I was elected, people came to complain to me about a couple of massage parlours—they put it more bluntly, and said that they were brothels. Among their complaints was that the Thai women working there had been brought over specifically for the purpose of working in the sex trade, and that they were being kept against their will, and so it turned out when the police finally took action and found that the brothels were at the centre of a big international network in trafficking women for the sex trade.

Since then, I have also had to deal with a number of children who have been brought into the country on a financial basis—whether it is people smuggling or trafficking depends partly on the definition, and is probably debatable. Some of the children have been exceptionally vulnerable, and I have had great fears about the level of protection provided for them and what has subsequently happened to them. One of them was almost certainly trafficked for domestic work, and that is one of the areas in which this legislation needs tightening up. Others have told me some information about how they came here—brought in by agents, with documents shown at passport control, being handed over to other agents and then brought up to Northampton. Because the children are with adults—albeit not their parents—they are not taken into social service care, nor given what I would regard as adequate protection. What will happen to them I do not know, but I would have thought that at the very least they are vulnerable to being used or abused, or if circumstances change, of finding themselves in a worse position.

To give an idea of the numbers, over the past year I have dealt with about 10 children who fall into this category, from southern and east Africa. South Asia is also a major area of concern in relation to trafficking and child pornography. The legislation will certainly help with some of those areas of concern. When I was in Cambodia earlier this year, I had the opportunity to speak to people who were trying to combat the growth of trafficking in children for prostitution and pornography, especially for internet porn, and some of the information was horrific. Children were being sold—and, sometimes, rescued, returned to their parents and resold by them—for as little as $20 into paedophile rings that included men from Europe and the UK, with the children being used to produce internet porn.

To make matters worse, efforts to counter the trade were often undermined by official corruption. I want to pay tribute to the heroic work being undertaken in Cambodia by the non-governmental organisations and by our UK ambassador to strengthen the resolve of the Cambodian Government to deal with the problems, as well as to provide practical help and support for the victims. I am sure that this legislation will also be of great support and use to them in their work.

Researchers into the subject of child trafficking find it very hard to determine precise numbers. Staff at the high commission in Lagos have estimated that they have detected more than 200 cases of possible child trafficking, and there are estimates of up to 10,000 unaccompanied minors in the UK. Home Office research found that in 1998 up to 1,400 women were trafficked for sexual exploitation. Some recent research done by ECPAT—the organisation that campaigns to end child prostitution and trafficking—found that trafficking had moved outside the big cities and the south-east where the authorities are more aware of the problem. My experiences as a constituency MP would certainly support that, and I completely agree with their conclusions about the need for more active support for the victims throughout the country.

That brings me to my second point, which is about support services for the victims, to support the excellent provisions of this Bill, and to make sure that those are made a reality for some of these very vulnerable children. I am sure that some of my colleagues will want to talk about the need for the safe house in West Sussex. I also feel, however, that there is a real need for protection and support throughout the country. That means ensuring that there is a legal framework for the provision. Many of the children—and, I suspect, the women—who are trafficked do not have proper immigration status here. My experience has been that while existing legislation can be used to provide support, even for those without status, it is incredibly difficult to get local authorities to recognise the needs of these children and their responsibilities for providing for them. There is also the problem that the children are treated as asylum cases, rather than child protection cases, which makes a difference to the way they are treated. They are sometimes joined to the asylum

applications of adults, which means that they are not assessed in their own right and on the basis of their own needs.

Mr. Dawson: Does my hon. Friend agree that clear cases exist in which asylum legislation and the threat of removal under that legislation can empower the trafficker and give them a greater hold over the adult or child whom they have trafficked?

Ms Keeble: I completely agree with my hon. Friend, and I was going to deal with that point later in my remarks.

The system is perhaps not intended to work in that way, but it often does at the practical level. In preparing for the implementation of this legislation, will Ministers give some very careful consideration to the support for victims? I see that the Home Office, as is mentioned in the background documentation for today's debate, has a working party on unaccompanied children, and perhaps this matter, including trying to capture information and scope the size of the problem, can be dealt with by that group, as the problems of unaccompanied and trafficked children blur at the edges.

It would also be helpful if clear guidelines were sent to local authorities, so that they knew what to do. At present, the only realistic way to get access to the support that should be provided under the Children Act 1989 is to go to court. However, the victims are the least likely to do that, so in many cases nothing happens.

I also want to deal with areas in which the Bill's provisions, excellent though they are, could be improved. One is the provision of a statutory reflection period, which is the point mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson). It was also raised in the other place. If we are seriously to deal with trafficking, we need to be able to prosecute the traffickers. That is difficult, not least because of the vulnerability of the victims and their unwillingness immediately to give information. Indeed, there are sometimes difficulties in trying to get information from them, given differences of language and culture.

In the example of the Thai massage parlours in my constituency, Northamptonshire police did an outstanding job in difficult circumstances, as there were problems with getting evidence once the women had been dispersed, or in some cases deported. These rings are often enormously sophisticated, and the resources that we are able to pit against them are quite small in terms of numbers. Also, I cannot think of how it would be possible to get information from children who are trafficked without providing good time to build their confidence and to win their trust.

I see that a reflection period forms part of a Home Office pilot project, and verbal assurances have been given on deportations in cases of trafficking. That needs to be clearly set out in the legal framework or there could be inconsistency in practice. That could set back the efforts to deal with this pernicious problem.

The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) took up the point that there should be differentiation between the trafficking of adults and of children. I have seen the record from the other place, where the argument against that involved the penalty. To pick up the hon. Gentleman's point and considering the other offences dealt with in the Bill, there are differences between offences committed against adults and those against children. There will be an inconsistency if the same distinctions are not drawn in relation to trafficking. I would argue that the age or youth of the person trafficked should be an aggravating factor, and it should influence how the offence is regarded and the offender treated. I hope that the assurances that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has already given will make it possible to deal with that issue. I urge the Government to draw differences between the trafficking of children and of adults.

Also, I see that trafficking is confined to that for sexual exploitation. I realise, of course, that the Bill relates to sexual offences, but it appears that some trafficking is for other purposes, in particular domestic work or, to be more honest, slavery. Some trafficking involves financial exploitation in the form of charges and benefits. Will my hon. Friend the Minister consider some of those other purposes and whether it might be possible to provide protection for people, especially children, who are the victims of such trafficking?

Whatever shape the Bill ends up in, it will be a huge improvement on the situation now. It will strengthen the arm of those who seek to end the trafficking and exploitation of some vulnerable people, and it represents a huge step forward in protecting some extremely vulnerable children from sexual crimes that have shocked us all over past decades. I welcome the Bill and commend it to the House.

3.33 pm

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble). I hope she will allow me to call her my hon. Friend, given our previous lives when she was leader of Southwark council. We always co-operated strongly, in spite of our party differences. She is right to draw the House's attention to the fact that we are dealing, for the first time in sexual offences legislation, not only with the domestic position and domestic law, but with the terrible abuse and exploitation that can happen internationally. Those can be dealt with quite effectively by domestic legislation, as long as there is collaboration across boundaries.

There is a blunt truth: people who 50 years ago would have made their money from armed robbery, 30 years ago would have made their money from pornography in its early days, and 10 or 20 years ago would have made their money from drugs, have decided that there is money to be made from exploiting people. They are completely ruthless and reckless in the harm that they can cause. It is important that we address that issue in this context, and the debate has given us a welcome opportunity to do so.

The Minister will have the task of steering this somewhat complex legislation through consideration in Committee. Mercifully, as my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) said to me, he will do so without some of the heat that, apparently, was generated in the House of Lords over many a long day and night.

I say to the Minister that we pay tribute to the fact that before the last election, when the present Foreign Secretary was the Home Secretary, the Labour

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Government grasped a nettle that needed to be grasped by saying that the sexual offences laws of this country needed to be reformed. The laws had been effectively untouched by a full review since the 1950s and some pieces of legislation dated back to earlier than that. A thorough reform was needed, although it was always thought that that would be difficult and controversial.

Vera Baird: Should not the Government also be commended on their earlier step in 1999 to abolish the admissibility of previous sexual history to show consent during rape trials?

Simon Hughes: Yes. The Government faced up to the need to take the files off the shelf in the Home Office and established the "Setting the Boundaries" review in 1999. They appointed good people to the review body, and the report, which formed the basis of the Bill, was completed after substantial work. The wide-ranging report tried to suggest up-to-date law that would be much clearer than before and non-discriminatory. This country had never before recognised that much of the existing law had been based on prejudices and assumptions that dated back to Victorian ages when, for example, the monarch did not believe that women could have same-sex relationships, so such relationships were never referred to. It was decided that the law needed to be brought up to date, and we should all be grateful for that.

I pay tribute to Members of the House of Lords who laboured long and hard on the Bill, especially our colleagues Lord Thomas of Gresford and Baroness Walmsley. The Home Secretary said that the Bill was a long time in the making—it was certainly a long time in the Lords. After hearing and reading several of the debates, one discovered that people such as Lady Saltoun of Abernethy appeared to have an unusual interest in such legislation—far be it for me to comment on whether she also has unusual expertise. The Bill seemed to preoccupy Members of the House of Lords, but they grasped several difficult nettles and managed to tease out answers that have led to a greater consensus. There is much more consensus on the Bill now than there was when it started its passage. The Home Affairs Committee and the Joint Committee on Human Rights have added sensible recommendations.

The Bill deals with four types of protection in particular: the protection of children; the protection of vulnerable adults, especially those with mental disorders or learning difficulties; the protection of all individuals who might be the target of unwarranted sexual approaches; and the protection of the public. I hope that we all share the view of the public at large that those who abuse children, young people and the vulnerable are, in colloquial terms, sad and sick individuals whose violence and perversion is revolting to society. We must protect the vulnerable against such people's activities. They are often in need of help and treatment, but none the less their actions must be minimised and people must be protected against them at all costs.

It has not yet been said that sexual abuse happens most often in the broader family context. It is next most likely to happen among people who know each other. Sexual abuse is least frequent among people who have never previously had contact. Unless we understand that fact, we fail to grasp the difficulty of dealing with the problem. Most such activity occurs between people who know each other all too well, not between people who have never met.

The Home Affairs Committee identified the controversial issues of how rape should be defined, what protection should be given to a defendant and how consent should be defined. There is a question of what we should do about the controversial issue of exposure, including activities that should be permitted and when people should be allowed to walk around without clothes on. Thankfully, we have got rid of the nonsense of convicting people of an offence because someone under 16 has seen them walking around at home with no clothes on. Mercifully, that has been sorted out.

Protecting children involves orders and registers, and we must ensure that offenders abroad are registered here. There is general agreement that the issue of the day—grooming for sexual purposes—should be an offence. That is welcome. There is, however, the caveat that we should not imply the commission of a further offence just because of a grooming prelude.

The final general issue is that of anonymity, which is the most difficult general problem that we still face. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) alluded to that.

I shall go into detail on only one aspect of the second tier of issues. We have to try to win the Home Secretary's magnum or flagon of champagne—I expected it to be bitter. It is nonsense that we criminalise young people between 13 and 16 for what may be minimal sexual activity that is not of a predatory nature—when it is effectively consensual—and is part of the natural process of an adolescent growing up. We all have to sort that out. There are enough crimes on the statute book and enough people criminalised without adding to it. Let us not be prudish and old fashioned. Throughout the history of the world, teenagers have explored themselves and each other, and that will continue. There is all the difference in the world between that and ensuring that activity with under-13s is unacceptable. That is what the Bill says, which is a good thing. There is no defence or excuse for interfering with under-13s. We should be clear that that is understood outside this place. That is why the event reported today, if it is true, of an adult running away with a child who is under 13 is serious and needs to be brought to a quick and satisfactory conclusion.

Liberal Democrats share the view that we are right to be clear about the need to deal with abuses of positions of trust. That has never been clear before. It does not matter who abuses that trust—whether it is the sports coach and a person in the team, the teacher and a person in the class, the priest and a person in the church, or the voluntary sector leader and a person in the group. That abuse is wrong and the relationship must not be taken beyond what is acceptable. We welcome the fact that the Bill picks up on that and tries to extend the principle to the abuse of people through prostitution and pornography.

I pay tribute to those who do the unglamorous work of tracking down people who commit such offences. In my previous life, I was involved in prosecutions on behalf of the police of people involved in those offences.

It is a gruesome, unpleasant and sordid business. Police officers will often only do it for a couple of years before going on to other work because they cannot stand the grotesque horror of it. However, it is important that it is done. The charities and the voluntary sector that help with it are extremely valuable.

On another point, I have a friend who has an adult daughter with learning difficulties. The mere fact of a child having learning difficulties does not mean that he or she should not have physical relationships with other people, although there used to be that presumption. I remember my friend telling me that when she was looking at a residential centre for her daughter, the person who ran it said, "Don't worry, Mrs. So-and-So, we'll make sure that your daughter doesn't get up to any hanky-panky", to which she said, "In that case, she's not coming, because I want her to live a full and fulfilled life like everyone else." It is important not to say that people with a mental disorder or learning difficulties should be precluded from normal sexual activity. The Bill is about not exploiting people; it is not about forbidding them from having a natural and normal life.

I told the Home Secretary that we needed to ensure that information is shared across continents and borders so that those who abuse in one country cannot get away with moving somewhere else.

It is important to get the rape issue right, not just because it is the most serious offence and the conviction rate is inadequate, but because it goes before a jury. I hope that that way of trying someone will be supported and upheld by the House of Lords when it considers the Criminal Justice Bill today. We must not change the presumption of innocence and the right to a fair trial just because of the sort of offence. That is why people laboured so hard to get the definition right, and I pay tribute to them. It may not be perfect, but the combination of clause 1 and clauses 76 and 77 is much clearer and will allow juries to receive much clearer guidance.

The best way in which to deal with a high level of acquittals is to try to grasp the nettle of anonymity. There should not be party views on the issue. The argument for the anonymity of the defendant, the complainant or the witness is that it is less damaging if identity is not revealed. Even though a defendant may be acquitted, the reputation gained does not go away. We can all think without much prompting of television personalities and people in the arts, sports or public life who, as a result of an unproven allegation, have not escaped from under a black cloud for many years. Alternatively, there is the argument that, as a result of a trial and those participating being in the public eye, other people come forward having realised that they ought to say something too and that others should be convicted.

The biggest danger is the press abusing its position. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield and his colleagues and my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) and I have been to see Ministers to say that we must prevent the publication of stories about prospective defendants—such stories are often leaked by the police—that take over the tabloids in particular and mean that there can be no fair trial. There have been some crude examples of that over the past year. I therefore hope that we can agree on provisions that offer protection from such exploitation. The issue goes wider than sex offences, although such cases are often the most vulnerable in that respect.

My preference is that we adopt the proposal of the Home Affairs Committee: from the moment of arrest at the latest to the moment of charge, anonymity rules should apply for all parties. After that, they should not, but the courts should be able to receive applications in either direction. A court should be able to agree to a request for the continuing anonymity of a defendant, witness or complainant, or it could decide, on receiving an application setting out why it is not in the public interest to apply the anonymity rule, that there is a good case for not doing so.

In the light of much constituency experience, I know that it is equally important that witnesses—not necessarily the complainant—receive the same protection, as they will often not come forward when they could substantiate a case because of the public embarrassment of doing so. The case might relate to a professional colleague or someone in the same family. We must bring everyone within such a remit.

I repeat that convicting for grooming for sexual purposes is fine, but we must not presume that that means that people have committed the intended offence. The intended offence must be separately proved; presumption is not enough.

I want to say a word about naturists. I do not know how many there are, but they have been making a lot of noise over recent months. Some of us accept that for many people nudity is not beautiful, although for others it is—all power to them and long may they celebrate it. I hope that we have struck the right balance in allowing people who want to walk around with nothing on to do so without prosecution while respecting that on some occasions that causes some people difficulty.

That brings me to the protection of the public. I hope that we have reached a common-sense solution. If one goes behind the sixth hillock with somebody on a warm, summer afternoon, it is not the job of the state to send people in blue to find them and prosecute. If one goes behind the 28th sand dune on the left on the east English coast on a rare warm, summer day, that is not the business of the state either. However, places such as public conveniences, which are meant to be used by the public, should not be no-go areas for the citizens of this country when they need to use them for the purpose for which they were intended. That is not a sexist, homophobic or anti-gay point: public conveniences are meant to be safe places, but often they are taken over and have become thoroughly unpleasant places. When the Bill has completed its passage, there should be a sign on each one saying that they are to be used for the purposes for which they were intended, and other activity will be dealt with. I hope that we proceed by the means of public order legislation, which would be a better way of tackling the problem than sexual offences legislation.

My hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) and for Romsey have volunteered to serve as Liberal Democrat members of the Committee considering this difficult Bill. In Committee, they will not be able to secure the provision of better treatment for people whose mental and psychological problems lead to sex offences, so that is a

[Simon Hughes]

battle that we must continue to fight elsewhere. Providing centres to treat people with such disorientations is just about the least popular cause in the country, but it has to be addressed. In the meantime, I hope that my hon. Friends will try to make sure, along with me and all our colleagues in the House, that we end up with a Bill that is modern, non-discriminatory, clear, enforceable and effective. I think that that is within our grasp, and it is a prize well worth attaining.

3.51 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I find myself in the unusual position of welcoming a Home Office Bill—I have not been too happy with the last two or three Home Office Bills that I have spoken about. The Bill deals with some difficult areas but, as we have already seen in our debate, there is a lot of general agreement about its direction. It is now a question of looking at the detail and getting it right.

I want to say something about the provisions on trafficking but, before I do so, I will comment on what the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) said about the difficult argument about anonymity in rape cases. I do not think that anyone is now arguing that there should not be anonymity for the complainant. The need for such anonymity has been generally accepted for some time, as it encourages reporting. We know about failure rates in the system and the low rate of conviction, but should the defendant have the right to anonymity? I believe that the Bill as it stands goes too far—we ought to look at what happens before a charge is made, not after. What the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey said about publicity is the key to the problem. It is often the police who pass information on. The *News of the World* discovers that a particular individual is being taken to a particular police station on a particular day because it has been told by someone in the police force, who has probably done it for a fairly small amount of money. Money often changes hands when such information is passed on, and we have to look at ways of dealing with that through the police service and the press, rather than start to extend anonymity provisions, as the amendment in the Lords has done.

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Gentleman may be gratified to hear that most of the senior policemen I have talked to would back what he is saying, as they have had many a case destroyed by publicity. If they could catch the individuals who have released that information to the papers they would be gratified and there would be heavy repercussions.

Mr. Gerrard: I am sure that is right. There can be nothing more frustrating for a senior policeman who has been investigating a case than to have it damaged or destroyed by someone leaking what is happening.

The question of trafficking was addressed my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), and I shall try not to repeat what she said. I have been interested in the subject for some time, as there are links with the smuggling that goes on in immigration and asylum cases, which are one of my major areas of interest. Two or three years ago, like a number of other hon. Members, I took part in the parliamentary police scheme, and spent a little time with the Chinese unit and the vice unit in the Metropolitan police. It was interesting to hear what police officers, particularly those in the Chinese unit, had to say about the amount of smuggling and trafficking of people that was going on.

There is a distinction between smuggling and trafficking, as the Government now recognise. If someone who is trying to get into the country for immigration purposes or to work illegally pays someone to bring them here, it is almost a commercial transaction. They pay to be brought in and that is the end of the business, whereas trafficking is quite different and ends up with people being exploited when they get into the country. It is a modern form of slavery, involving debt bondage—debts that they can never pay off, and perhaps with a family back in the country of origin still paying off a debt.

As the Bill deals with sexual offences, I understand why it refers to trafficking for sexual exploitation, but I hope we will not lose sight of the fact that a considerable amount of trafficking goes on for labour purposes. That involves not only children, but adults, and it is not just for domestic service. There are other areas, especially in some service industries, where a significant amount of trafficking for labour purposes goes on. That is just as bad as trafficking of the sort addressed by the Bill.

Many of the people—certainly, many of the adults—who have been trafficked may well come to the UK thinking that they are going to work in a legitimate job. They may even come knowing full well that they are going to work in the sex business. People are told that they can earn good money working in a club, in a strip club or as a prostitute, but they may not understand what is really going to happen to them when they get here.

Some poor countries—for example, Thailand—have an indigenous sex industry. I recently saw it suggested that because of the extent of the sex industry in Bangkok, the amount of money sent back to poor families in the rural areas of Thailand by women working in the sex industry in Bangkok exceeds any Government aid to those areas. Working in the sex trade is almost an accepted way of getting some money to the family, so we can understand how somebody might think, "If I could go to London, I could make a lot of money", but when they get here, they find that they are not making any money at all and are virtual slaves.

It is probably as profitable a criminal activity internationally to traffick people as to deal in drugs. There is not a huge amount of hard evidence about what is happening in the UK. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North mentioned the ECPAT study and the study that was reported in the police research paper published in 2000. Those papers suggested that there might be 1,500 women a year being trafficked into the UK to work in prostitution. The police research paper reported on a check carried out by police on 50 flats in Soho. In those 50 flats, the majority of the women were migrants—125 of the 148 women were from the Balkans, mostly from Albania. There is clearly organisation there. Very few English women now work in the flats in Soho. The work has been taken over.

Although some of those women may not have been trafficked, there is little doubt that a significant number would have been.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North is right—the key to dealing with the problem is not just introducing legislation that imposes penalties, but making that legislation work. We will make it work only if the people who have been trafficked are genuinely regarded as victims and are given the support that they need to be prepared to give evidence. The pilot scheme is under way and it has Home Office funding. I think that it has 11 places for women who have been trafficked. That is a small number, but it is a beginning. West Sussex social services have been running a safe house specifically for child victims. We have got to get the links with our policies on removal and asylum right. If the message that goes out to victims is, "If the police find you, you will be deported," it is highly unlikely that many of them will be willing to risk giving evidence. Deporting somebody may mean that they go back to the people who trafficked them in the first place and fall back into risk.

I know that some work has been done, particularly through the Metropolitan police, to look at ways of getting more evidence for prosecutions through intelligence gathering. We need to encourage such work and put more effort in so that cases do not depend so much on individuals being prepared to act as witnesses. There are other information sources, but there is no question but that a lot of police forces do not give much attention to them. They do not have much knowledge and experience in such things and assume that they do not happen in their area. Northampton is a good example; it is clear that not only London is affected and that such activities could be happening anywhere in the country.

Furthermore, if we are going to make the legislation work, we will undoubtedly need prevention campaigns in countries of origin. In many cases, countries of origin are poor and countries of reception, such as the UK, are rich. The reason why trafficking operates in that direction is obvious. The movement is not always from poor to rich, but that is very often the case.

I am pleased that we have made progress. It was back in 2000 that we signed the European Union protocol stating that we would introduce legislation on trafficking. We have got to make the arrangements work and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider how we can extend them into the areas that the Bill does not cover.

I wish to raise two other issues of concern. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) referred to people who are on the sex offenders register in respect of acts that are no longer an offence. For example, a gay man who was convicted for involvement in sexual activity with a 17-year-old will have ended up on the register. I understand the difficulties that are involved in dealing with this issue. At the time of conviction, there may not have been much questioning as to whether an act was consensual if it was an offence anyway. The Home Office may have reservations about taking people off the sex offenders register when the act was not consensual—a matter that might not be easy to distinguish. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) follows my point. If the offence was involvement in sexual activity with someone under 18, the court may not have concerned itself with the issue of consent. Nevertheless, even if we cannot agree to an amendment that wipes people off the register, I hope that we can consider mechanisms enabling people to apply for removal and put forward the facts of their case.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, not least because I have not been present in the Chamber for most of the debate, although I have seen it on television. He is making a very important point. Does he share the belief of many people that taking some of the names off the register will make it a more reliable source of information in the hands of the police and local communities?

Mr. Gerrard: That is absolutely right. I understand the logic of the argument that we cannot retrospectively remove an offence. If somebody committed an act that was illegal, the conviction cannot be wiped off the slate. However, it is clear that if somebody is not a danger, it is pointless to include them on a register that will be used to check whether a person is a danger.

The other point about the sex offenders register that concerns me somewhat is that it is possible that somebody's name could be put on the register when they have merely been cautioned for an offence. If the police did not regard what was happening as serious enough to merit a charge, there is a question mark over whether that person should appear on the register.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, particularly as I was unable to attend earlier. As he knows, because he took part in that debate, I was responsible for the Protection of Children Act 1999. So-called soft information was to be put on to the register because otherwise young people would be at risk and because it gave the opportunity to check for more information. The reason for keeping somebody who has been a convicted offender on the register for ever is that if they had made a serious sexual attack on a child, say, 20 years ago, they may well offend again, and the law should not permit them to do so.

Mr. Gerrard: I have no difference of view about somebody who has attacked a child that person is on the register and should stay there. Rather, I am concerned about a relatively small number of cases involving particularly people who, as a result of the change in the age of consent, would not now be regarded as having committed an offence.

Clauses 121 to 127, which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), could have wide implications. The police can apply for a risk of sexual harm order on the grounds that the defendant has, on at least two occasions, committed one of a number of acts. One of those acts is to give a child anything that relates to sexual activity, which, as the notes to the Bill state, could include a condom. We should remember that a child is defined in this context as someone who is under 16. I can imagine that in a number of situations a person might feel that it was in the best interests of a child of that age to give them a condom. This part of the Bill allows orders to be issued against someone who has not been convicted of anything. When it becomes known that a person has had a risk of sexual harm order placed

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on them, they will find it almost as bad as having had a conviction, because they will still be seen as a paedophile. One of the arguments about anonymity in rape cases is that people say that there is no smoke without fire—that if a person has been charged, there must be something to it. That argument applies at least equally strongly in this case.

It might be argued that the police and courts will not apply for orders on trivial grounds—although I can think of one or two ex-chief constables whom I would not have trusted not to do so—but we should not afford them that opportunity. I hope that when we reach this part of the Bill in Committee we can debate an amendment or, at the very least, ensure that the guidance that goes to the police and the Crown Prosecution Service makes it absolutely clear what sorts of cases the provision should be used for. It has the potential to catch a very wide range of activities, at least some of which most people would not regard as problematic.

Overall, the Bill makes considerable progress. It reforms the law on some difficult subjects in a way that receives broad consent. That is an achievement and I hope that we can sort out the problems in Committee and end with a measure that will work.

4.10 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): It is interesting to follow the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard). If he serves on the Committee, I hope that he will accept an offer that I have already extended from Detective Chief Inspector Sarti of the paedophile unit at Scotland Yard to attend a brief teach-in. I have spoken to a Home Office Minister about the subject and she believes that it is a good idea.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow is right that there are problems, but we need to know where the taskforce came from to understand how it reached its current position, so that if the Committee wants to improve on its suggestions, it does not lose sight of the objective.

The Bill is unusual for several reasons. First, as my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) said, most people who examine the measure—including some of my constituents who knew that I aimed to speak about it—become squeamish and are horrified. The attendance in the Chamber suggests that everybody supports the Bill and wants something to be done, but no one wants to read about it in the newspapers or get too close to the issues.

The second rarity is the considerable co-operation between members of all parties who show an interest in the Bill. When the White Paper was announced, the Home Secretary asked for co-operation, and I asked for it to be two-way. To a great extent, that has happened in the other place and I hope that that continues in Committee and on Report here.

We have a rare opportunity that we must not miss. It has taken a long time to introduce such a Bill and I suspect that there will be no similar measure for a long time. We have an opportunity to take pre-emptive action in the Bill. The police have been considering some of the changes, especially those in IT, for a long time. Whatever we think of paedophiles, they are not thick. I watched an interview of a paedophile under treatment who was a rocket scientist. His understanding of IT and opportunities to use it to confound the police were considerable.

I shall restrict my comments to the provisions that deal with sexual offences against children and with those commonly known as paedophiles. Like the hon. Member for Walthamstow, I did the police parliamentary course in 1999–2000. I was lucky enough to do it with the Metropolitan Police Authority, which covered everything, such as fast cars, guns, criminal intelligence, kidnapping and police dogs. That was all immensely instructive. However, I was scarred by the day I visited the paedophile unit. I did not know that individuals with such incredible desires existed. I did not have the benefit—if that is the right word—of being a barrister and of having practised in the courts. I am surrounded by members of the legal profession again today. I was stunned by the information on the internet, the links through it and paedophiles' use of it to stimulate their activities. I was shocked that the paedophile information exchange used it to stimulate other activities and that members of such organisations frequently required "fresh", as they put it, photographs. That meant the abuse of yet another child or children to produce them. I could barely imagine the harm that was done to children. Some photographs and films are of children who are young enough to wear nappies.

The police's conservative estimate is that there are approximately 230,000 active paedophiles in the country—one for every street. They also estimate that one in nine are female. Rose West and Myra Hindley are the best known examples. Public interest was stimulated by three brave programmes that BBC 2 broadcast. Those who cared to watch or could stand watching them found that the practice had gone on for many years. I remember some of the interviewees saying that, as children—they were now grandparents—they could remember seeing men with cameras at the swimming pool photographing the kids. This has been going on for years. The first two programmes focused on one particular group of paedophiles who had been grooming—engaging in "the hobby", as they put it—since 1957. That gives us an idea of how many children those four or five men must have damaged.

The other thing that stood out in the programmes was the fact that many paedophiles need to record their activities. They do so for their own use—using the written word, photographs, tape recordings, videos, computers, CD-ROMs and, latterly, DVDs. Of course, what they are recording is the abuse of children, and if anyone has any doubt about that, they should watch the third programme that the BBC put out, which was quite startling and really thumped home what these people were recording. I will not go into details, because there is no watershed here and we must remember that there are people in the Strangers Gallery.

My reaction was to ask the police why, if they knew about all these individuals, more of them were not put away. They said that they needed changes in the law, and that they had been told that such changes were coming. I decided, along with an American researcher, Michael Hansen, who is now a law student in the U.S, to get stuck into seeing what was being done here and in the

rest of the world. We used the internet and talked to people in a large number of places including Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Under the aegis of the Conservative Front Bench, I then introduced a number of new clauses when the Criminal Justice and Court Services Bill was being considered on Report. I was delighted that the right hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), who was then a Minister of State at the Home Office, was very positive about my proposals. That was not really a surprise, as he is a family man and a Methodist. I thought that his reaction was quite normal. Some of the proposals that were put forward in another place were accepted, but there was also an acceptance that these matters would be looked at in this Bill. Many of them have been. It is vitally important—we need to remember this in Committee—that it was recognised that we should be proactive rather than reactive in these matters, as I mentioned in an earlier intervention. If we are reactive, a child—if not more than one—has already been damaged.

I also had the pleasure of being put on the taskforce, on which some really imaginative proactive thinking took place. The core legal changes on internet grooming are down to that group, which contained everyone across the range including the police, the NSPCC and many other organisations that are deeply concerned with freedoms and rights. What came out of those deliberations was an amalgam, and we need to remember that when we consider the Bill in Committee.

I have been talking recently to some Americans who were over here for a case led by Valeria Spencer, an assistant attorney at the United States Department of Justice. They are watching what we are doing in the Bill with considerable interest. This morning, the "Today" programme took a shot—as is its wont—at the Bill, suggesting that it is all very well us doing this here, but that the internet is international. I was sorry that I could not ring up and intervene. The Bill is being considered right across the world, and many other countries that are looking into these matters are watching to see what happens here. If this legislation works—and I think it will—they will adopt such measures themselves. Equally, there are one or two things being done in other countries that we ought to seize the opportunity to consider in Committee.

I say that because I believe that this is a one-off chance. In Committee and on Report, we shall discuss a number of difficulties that my hon. Friends and Labour Members have already touched on. For a change, that will be done in the right atmosphere. Our deliberations will not be aggressive, and they will provide an opportunity to make a real change, bearing in mind that it will be our last chance to do so for a number of years.

The issue that I really want to touch on in Committee is encryption. The taskforce and the Home Secretary know that I have an interest in this. Technology is moving very fast, and the paedophile internet exchange group had a ringleader who dodged prosecution because the police could not break the encryption on his disk. It was a fairly simple form of encryption bought for about $50 in the United States, but it could not be broken by the police or the security forces. An approach was made in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 to change that. Unfortunately, that aspect of the legislation was not implemented and it would be inappropriate, sadly, to apply it to paedophiles or abuses against children. I hope that we can now start to examine the problem further.

In the United States a considerable amount of child porn is sold encrypted on DVDs and CD-ROMs. Much of it comes from Russia, but the police cannot break into it. If it is bought by individuals and put on their computer files—the material may appear from the outside to be about Robin Hood and his merry men—until the encryption code is obtained, access to it cannot be gained. Paedophiles previously recorded their activities on video, but they now use DVDs and CD-ROMs in encrypted form. Often the opportunity for the police to nail individuals for some absolutely horrendous crimes—they could do it before, because videos could not be encrypted—is no longer there. We will find it very difficult indeed to deal with that obstacle.

The Home Secretary said that much could be done beyond the Bill, and he is absolutely right. Much has already been done—by the Home Office taskforce, organisations such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and others, and by the Metropolitan police, in conjunction with Crimestoppers. An effective interactive programme has been developed to take into schools for the appropriate age groups, and it will be polished up and developed. It engages the children in internet activities, explains their importance, but also brings in warnings. The children are brought into what they believe is a chat room, but next door there is really a large and ugly policeman who is typing in the name of Alice or some other name. The children react to it; they give their telephone numbers and addresses; a meet is arranged. The children all fall into that, but of course the mobile telephone of one of the children in the room then rings, the door opens, and the biggest, ugliest, tallest, largest Metropolitan policeman who can be found enters the room declaring that he is Alice. It brings the message home to the children.

We will have to follow this matter up and reflect further on it, but what often happens is that the children start to talk to their teachers or the police about their experiences. Many children have already had them, though their parents do not know it and the children have often not told anyone else. If this form of education can continue and develop, we can move on through Crimestoppers to the police, who can then take action. I suspect that the public and perhaps even the police are unaware of the extent to which such internet grooming goes on.

I welcome the Bill; I welcome the fact that it is non-partisan, and I hope that we can keep it that way. I also hope that we do not do what *The Economist* did in a recent article on child porn—forget that for every single photograph of a child, a child has been abused. I hope that the author of that article thinks a little further. How would he have felt if a photograph of him or his mother, son or daughter had been put on the internet for ever? I welcome the fact that the Bill will be dealt with in Committee with an open mind. I hope that we make the most of our limited opportunity, and that we are proactive and think forward—particularly in respect of the internet and information technology.

4.24 pm

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): It is good to have the opportunity to participate in this important debate, particularly to follow the hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), who made such an effective and serious contribution. We have all been informed, instructed and, indeed, shocked by what he had to say.

I do not think that the Bill's importance can be overstated. I am sure that all of us acknowledge that sexual abuse can have the most devastating consequences, and that it can undermine and destroy people's lives.

The Bill is important in another way. It covers areas of law and policy that are complex and sensitive, and which test a difficult area—the shifting balance between private lives and the proper concerns of Government. The problems are especially acute for young people at different ages and levels of maturity, who are bound to test the boundaries set for them by concerned parents and by Governments.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), in recent years I have sometimes criticised the Government and the Home Office for legislating in haste, but it is clear that the care, thought, discussion and listening that have gone into the Home Office review of sexual offences and the White Paper were carried on in the debate in another place. On the evidence of today, that process will continue in this House. The rewards of that excellent consultative and participatory approach will be evident in legislation that will be thorough and well-balanced.

I commend the Government on the Bill, and look forward to its further improvement. I commend them too on their determination to protect the public from dangerous offenders, and on their courage and humanity in their approach to modernising and equalising the law on sexual offences.

I could go on for some time about those matters, but I will confine my remarks mostly to the Bill's impact on children. I am extremely grateful to Lisa Payne and Alison Lindsay of the National Children's Bureau for their production of a child impact statement on behalf of the all-party children group.

It is important that the Bill carries a statement by the Home Secretary to the effect that he considers its provisions to be compatible with the European convention on human rights. I look forward to the day when Governments place statements on all Bills asserting that they are compatible with the UN convention on children's rights. Legislation will be much better and more effective if we make a close assessment of the impact of proposals on the lives of children.

I welcome the Bill's emphasis on certain issues, including the age of consent at 16. The Government have brought about the equalisation of the age of consent at 16, and I consider that to be very important. For a host of reasons connected to child protection, it is very important that we give out consistent messages about the age of consent and that we reaffirm the significance of the age of 16. I welcome the proposal to increase to life imprisonment, in certain circumstances, the sentence for people convicted of the sexual abuse of a child. The new offence of sexual activity with a child under 16 is important, and I very much welcome the new offence of sexual grooming.

We have seen some real progress on child prostitution. We can only estimate the scale of that problem, but I have no doubt that it is considerable. For the first time, we have a specific set of offences to deal with the commercial sexual exploitation of children, again with the most severe penalties for people who abuse children through prostitution. I also welcome the extension of legislation to children of 16 and 17. The more we recognise and reaffirm that children are children until the age of 18, the better our legislation will be.

I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary affirm that children who are abused through prostitution will not be liable to prosecution for any criminal offence. That is an essential child protection measure. I hope that the impact of the provision will be reviewed throughout government. I am worried that the guidance that still prevails in some parts of government reflects old legislation and the old status, when children were criminalised when they should have been protected.

We have already heard some effective speeches on trafficking. This Bill is an opportunity for the Government to get to grips with that horrendous problem. I welcome the new offence. With other hon. Members I question the fact that no separation is being put in place between adults and children. That means that someone could be convicted of trafficking a child to this country, abusing the child and enabling others to do so, and could end up with a sentence of six months' imprisonment. That is inappropriate and needs to be tackled.

An even bigger issue is the fact that we simply do not know the scale of trafficking in this country. In West Sussex, where much work has been done around the safe house project and with immigration authorities at Gatwick airport, we know that hundreds of children are coming through the airport, largely from west Africa, on their way here or to other European countries to be sexually abused. There is no reason to suppose that any port in the country is free from the problem. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) it crops up in places that do not have ports or airports.

The Government need to face up to that problem. It needs to be taken out of the arena of asylum and immigration legislation and located within child protection. We need some thorough research to find out the extent of the problem; some good work on ways to deal with children who are trafficked to this country; and some effective models of good practice.

We need to ensure that such children are not sent straight back into the hands of traffickers. When they come to the attention of the authorities in this country, they must not be simply returned to their country of origin, back into abusive situations where they might be killed. We need to ensure that they are protected in this country. That should be one of the Government's first duties.

Although the safe house project is not the perfect model for dealing with children in such circumstances, it has done good work, yet it is under threat of closure.

There are examples of local authorities elsewhere in the country taking similar initiatives, but because they are under pressure from lack of resources and heavy work loads, they have largely turned a blind eye to the problem. The Government need to take a lead in dealing with the problem by identifying good models of practice and resourcing them effectively. Trafficking needs further consideration.

Other Members have referred to the new offence of sexual touching and the problems that could arise in relation to mutually agreed behaviour among peers. When I attended debates on another Bill, bottles of wine were offered as a challenge to people to pronounce the names of Welsh constituencies but, so far, I have not been offered large quantities of champagne by a Secretary of State for a contribution to a Bill. It cannot be beyond the wit of the House to come up with an amendment along the lines that nothing in the Bill should criminalise behaviour that, in the eyes of an ordinary, reasonable person, would constitute normal adolescent experience. In reaffirming the significance of 16 as the age of consent, it behoves us all us to find a sensible way of dealing with the ordinary experiences of adolescence and mutually agreed behaviour among peers.

The strong prohibition against any activity involving children aged under 13 is of enormous significance. In legislating for children, we face a dichotomy: they are seen as either victims or villains. If we set such store by the age of 13, we should also consider raising the age of criminal responsibility to that age, as the implication of the proposals is that we would still be criminalising the disturbed behaviour of under-13-year-olds who abuse other children.

We should not ignore the estimate that about a quarter of all rape victims are children, and that about a quarter of the offences against them are committed by other children. We need to address the issue thoroughly, and to deal with it therapeutically rather than by criminalising the disturbed behaviour of children who commit such offences. As has been said already, if we can deal with that behaviour at a very young age, we might be able to stop young people developing into serious offenders when they become adults.

Using the sex offenders register for young children is not appropriate; we need to develop a range of assessment and treatment services for them. It is important that we adopt a strategic approach to children who display sexually harmful behaviour, and I very much welcome the Home Secretary's reference to establishing a ministerial committee on sex offending, which will give us the opportunity to take an holistic approach to prevention, protection and support in this very disturbing area of social policy.

As I have said, the Bill raises issues apart from the age of consent vis-à-vis the age of criminal responsibility and children's legislation vis-à-vis asylum legislation, and we also need to adopt an holistic approach to the treatment of adult offenders. Since becoming a Member of Parliament, I have had the opportunity to visit a treatment centre for men who have sexually abused children. Some of them have been convicted of very serious offences against children. Some of them have recognised that their behaviour was extremely worrying and possibly extremely damaging. I found it a challenging experience to meet those people and to hear about some of the things that they had done. I was incredibly impressed by the work done to encourage and challenge those men and to make them face up to the reality of the abuse that they had carried out.

The Government have faced a very difficult issue, very bravely. As a society, we simply have to face up to the fact that there are a lot of sex offenders out there and that there are effective ways to deal with their behaviour, but this is a real, big issue for all hon. Members and for all those who represent communities. We need a really good network of treatment centres for people who sexually abuse others, particularly children. Until we have those centres, we will not have an holistic approach that takes in legislation and the development of a range of policies. Until we treat those people and deal with their extremely aberrant, dangerous and horrific behaviour, we cannot say that we are protecting children. I welcome the Bill; it has some way to go, but, on the whole, it is extremely positive.

4.43 pm

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): This has been one of the most constructive and interesting debates in which I have been fortunate enough to take part during the two years that I have been a Member of Parliament. That constructiveness was exemplified not only by the contribution that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), but particularly by the powerful speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), who obviously spoke with enormous experience and passion on the subject.

I also commend the Home Secretary, first, for his willingness to accept most of the improvements that were introduced in the House of Lords and, secondly, for saying that he will consider some of the proposals not only from my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench, but from Back Benchers. I want to restrict my remarks to the issue that I raised in an intervention during the Home Secretary's speech: child trafficking and clauses 59 to 61.

Of course, the trafficking of human beings has gone on since the dawn of time, and has involved unimaginable human misery and suffering. These days, it usually, although not exclusively, involves women and children and a highly sophisticated and lucrative network and business that affects every country in the world. I want to pay tribute to the work of UNICEF in bringing this issue to our attention, and to its campaign and publication, "End Child Exploitation: Faces of Exploitation", which I hold up to show Members — not something that I have done before, but there is always a first time. I pay tribute in particular to Jenny Willott and her team for bringing these issues to the attention of Members of Parliament.

As a number of Members have said, it is difficult to estimate the number of victims of trafficking, because, almost by definition, it is a clandestine activity. In 1997, the US State Department made a stab at estimating how many people were involved, and suggested 700,000. The United Nations now thinks that the figure is closer to 1.2 million, and I am delighted that UNICEF is doing more work in this area and hopes at the end of this month to

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come forward with more research giving us a better idea of the scale of the problem that we face. We do not need that research to tell us, however, that it is a very serious problem. For every single victim involved, it is a human tragedy, especially when children are affected.

As the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) said in her speech – of course, she speaks with some authority on these issues – much of the trafficking about which we are talking takes place within certain regions of the world, such as west Africa, in relation to trafficking for forced labour and forced domestic service, and south-east Asia, in relation to trafficking of children and women for sexual exploitation.

What I want to focus on – as we are most likely to have a direct impact on it – is those who are trafficked into the UK, either as an end destination or when passing through. One of the aspects of the Bill that I welcome particularly is that its scope is broad enough to catch people who are involved at all stages of the supply chain: those responsible for the feeding of people, the provision of transport and so on. That is all spelled out in the explanatory notes, which is very welcome.

As I said, it is difficult to know how many people are involved, but there are many signs that this is a growing problem for this country. As the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) has already told us, whereas three years ago 85 per cent. of the sex workers in Soho were British, 85 per cent. of them now are foreign, most of them from central and eastern Europe. Some of them, of course, will be children, who are treated with a cruelty and brutality that we find difficult to comprehend, involving everything from beatings to gang rapes to enforced drug dependency. As a society, we recognise the particular heinousness of crimes when they involve children, which is what much of this Bill is about. The press release that came out when the Bill was published said that the protection of children was at its heart. That is the case, with one exception: the clauses relating to trafficking.

That was the point that I made to the Home Secretary, because I think that those clauses are a mistake. Under the Bill as it stands, as the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre pointed out, trafficking offences involving children could attract the lower sentence in a magistrates court of a maximum of six months imprisonment or even just a fine. That does not reflect—I probably speak for other Members in saying so—the seriousness of trafficking offences involving children. In my view, those cases should only be referred to a Crown court and should attract the higher maximum sentences set out in this legislation.

The Home Secretary, in his response to my intervention, was incredibly positive and helpful in the sense that he said that he would look specifically at this issue and at whether a distinction should be made for offences involving children. I hope he does so. I am pleased that others who have spoken, including the hon. Members for Lancaster and Wyre and for Northampton, North, raised that point. I hope also that the Minister, who is my constituency neighbour and a good and reasonable person, takes that issue on board. As he will probably be doing the spade work in Committee, he might address it there.

Passing the trafficking legislation, welcome though that is, will not in itself be enough. First, the legislation has to work. This is a key aspect: the child's point of entry to the UK – either an airport or elsewhere – clearly represents a critical moment, because it is almost certainly the best and often the only opportunity to rescue them from exploitation and the lifelong damage that will follow.

It is vital that immigration officials and others who may come into contact with trafficked victims have the right training. The Home Office has set up a working group, and there is a "tool kit" and all sorts of jargon for people who are involved, but all this comes down to a simple thing – getting the right training so that our immigration officials and others can recognise vulnerable children, spot the tell-tale signs showing that a child might be being trafficked and intervene.

As other Members have said, we must ensure that the care provided for those vulnerable children is adequate. Most are placed in ordinary social services accommodation, but they often escape or simply walk out of the door. Also, they often make contact with the person who trafficked them in the first place. That may seem strange on the face of it, but it is not. Think about it: these children are far from home and frightened. Probably the only person they know is the person who brought them into the country. Of course, they might not be aware of what is in store for them on being trafficked, so that leads them to make contact again with their trafficker, which leads to horrendous circumstances.

Mr. Cameron: Like others, my hon. Friend is making a powerful speech on the problems of trafficking, but is not part of the problem the fact that our asylum system invites traffickers to abuse it? Although it is clearly right to tighten up the criminal law and do all the things that the Bill is doing, will it ever be possible to clamp down on trafficking of children and prostitutes while we have an asylum system that does not consider having a quota of asylum seekers coming to this country who could be processed properly nearer to their countries of origin? That would enable us to bring over to this country vulnerable people fleeing persecution, rather than leave so much of the asylum system as it is – in the hands of the traffickers.

Mr. Osborne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I shall not be drawn into a discussion of the asylum system, but, of course, he is absolutely right. Many of the criminal gangs involved in the asylum trade are also involved in the trafficking trade. Those are distinct problems, as people who use criminal gangs to seek asylum are conscious of what they are doing whereas often people being trafficked are not conscious of what is in store for them. My hon. Friend is right that we shall leave a gaping hole in the protection that we offer people who face trafficking until we tackle the abuses of the asylum system.

We need to consider what is called a statutory period of reflection, which countries such as Sweden, Italy and the United States have pioneered. It would give victims a certain period in which they would be allowed to remain in the UK while options for their future were considered. I am talking about a period of around six months. Obviously, simply returning a child to the

country of origin places that child at tremendous risk of being re-trafficked and exploited. Indeed, the UNICEF document contains some pretty horrific case studies.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Do not the countries that provide such extra care and a period of reflection have more successful prosecutions of traffickers?

Mr. Osborne: The hon. Lady is exactly right because that is exactly what the evidence suggests. I do not know whether there is a direct link because the statistics perhaps show that those countries are better at handling the issues in general and are on top of the trafficking problem.

A period of reflection would be a great advantage because it would enable us to give victims real counselling and help, which must be our first priority, and make it more likely that victims would give evidence and testify against traffickers. One of the biggest problems that the police face when dealing with the crime is finding people, who are often scared and frightened children or young women, to stand up in a court of law and give evidence against powerful criminal gangs, many of which have links with the community or village in the country from which they came. Other countries have tackled the traffickers more effectively, which has restricted the trafficking trade and caused the criminal gangs to turn their attentions elsewhere.

I agree with what several hon. Members said and hope that the Government will introduce legislation to deal with trafficking for purposes other than sexual exploitation, such as forced labour and domestic service. The matter was raised in the House of Lords and the then Minister, Lord Bassam, said:

"Work is in progress on developing an offence of trafficking for labour exploitation. As yet no legislative vehicle has been identified for taking that forward" – [*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 May 2003; Vol. 648, c. 222.]

I understand that the Bill is not such a legislative vehicle and that there are pressures on fitting legislation into the Government's programme. However, I urge the Minister to address the issue, not least because we have pretty serious international obligations. We have signed the United Nations convention on the rights of the child and the UN protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children – I had to write that one down although it is pretty important. The framework decision on trafficking that the European Union adopted last year compels member states to incorporate trafficking legislation in domestic law within two years.

Let me get it absolutely straight that the Bill is a huge step in the right direction. There is an opportunity to do more and I urge the Minister to make trafficking involving children a distinct offence. If he introduces legislation to address trafficking for purposes other than sexual exploitation, he will have done a truly good job.

4.57 pm

Vera Baird (Redcar): I congratulate the Home Secretary on a Bill that will significantly clarify and update the law on sexual offences. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne), who said that legislation on its own is not always the complete answer. That is true when one considers rape. However, before I contextualise the new changes and outline what I hope the changes to rape law will bring, I congratulate the Home Secretary on the insight that underpins the new way in which the Bill defines the offence of rape.

Rape is an important and serious problem in our society. It is thought that one in five women and a number of men suffer rape or sexual violence at some time during their lives. Although it is well understood that rape is under-reported, rape reporting is currently at an all-time high. There were 3,391 reports of rape in 1990 and the figures for 2001, which are the latest figures that I have been able to get hold of, show that there were 9,008 reports in that year. The number of reports has more than doubled and almost tripled during a decade. However, the conviction rate was 25 per cent. in 1990 – no one suggested that that was too high. Given that the conviction rate was only 5.8 per cent. in 2001, I think I can say that the conviction rate has slumped.

Last April, Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service inspectorate and Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary produced a joint report on the way in which rape is investigated and prosecuted. The report said that rape was the most traumatising of offences and noted the profound impact that it has on victims' lives. It is, indeed, a travesty that so few examples of that serious offence result in a conviction. There is, of course, no deterrence in a very low conviction rate, so the changes to the law are especially important.

However, compared with other crimes, far fewer complaints about rape get to court. There is a big drop-out rate, some of which is due to women withdrawing their complaints. A lot of research confirms that part of the reason for that is that they fear that the details of previous sexual history – true or false – will be put to them. They are also worried about being asked whether they were wearing a short dress or scarlet lipstick, with the intention of showing that that licensed the attack or that they are promiscuous and not worthy of belief. As I said to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), the Government wisely and effectively sought to abolish the admissibility of previous sexual history to show consent as long ago as 1999, but it is still admissible, even as we discuss clause 1, to show that the defendant believed that the complainant was consenting.

On the drop-out rate, there is much less point in changing the law if we cannot get women to court to sustain complaints to trial. I acknowledge that the Government have done much to get more women to court, but for clauses 1, 75 and 76 – the rape-related clauses – to be effective, there is more that they should do. They have encouraged excellent police initiatives to train front-line staff to be supportive to rape complainants in a way that they were not before. Project Sapphire, run by the Metropolitan police, has an active investigation policy for rapes. As well as giving support to complainants, the key to rape convictions is to find corroborative evidence so that the deadlock of his word against hers, and vice versa, is broken. The Government have encouraged that approach through excellent initiatives.

However, the amount of moral support and help a complainant – male or female – gets at the outset is in direct proportion to his or her ability to sustain a

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complaint to prosecution and for it to be held up in court. Although that is well known, when we discuss clauses 1, 75 and 76, we will have to face the fact that four rape crisis centres have closed for want of funds in the past 18 months. If the Bill is to work, and as women will only sustain complaints if they are given support at the outset and throughout their trauma, it is essential that the Government establish a clear, strong and well-resourced policy of support for rape complainants.

The Government should do more to encourage the creation of sexual assault referral centres. Those are usually adjacent to hospitals. The units are run by specialists for the benefit solely of the victims of sexual assault. A woman can go there with the police, or on her own, or she can phone and be brought to it. She is treated as a patient rather than a witness. No decisions are forced on her and no detailed statements are taken; just enough to allow the relevant health checks. She is encouraged to give samples in case she wants to prosecute, but with no obligation to make the decision to do so then. She is examined by an expert who has the expertise to give evidence about findings, going way beyond that of most forensic medical examiners at police stations who are GPs with generalised experience. Counselling can be arranged. A change of clothes can be arranged. She can be taken home. The police can be brought in the next day to take a statement if that is what she wants. It will, of course, be a specialist-trained officer who liaises with the sexual assault referral centre.

SARCs offer the best kind of support. One in every major urban centre would reduce the drop-out rate significantly and enhance the impact of the changes in the law. At the moment, however, there are only six sexual assault referral centres in the country, so in many areas such as mine on Teesside, complainants cannot receive the support that such resources can supply.

Cleveland police my local force—and I are organising a conference of stakeholders for September in order to consider creating a Teesside SARC. That requires input not only from the police, because such centres aid detection, but from health trusts, because the after-effects of rape are a major health issue. Most of all, there is a need for finance or a definite prioritising by the Home Office of police and health funding. Not a large amount of money is needed to run a centre. REACH, the excellent centre in Newcastle upon Tyne, runs on about £250,000 a year.

SARCs should be linked to the national rape helpline, to which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary rightly referred, so that by calling a single number, a woman can receive local help wherever the traumatising crime occurs. Project Sapphire, which works closely with The Haven, a sexual assault referral centre in south London, is sure that its next figures will show a lower drop-out rate and a better conviction rate owing to that liaison.

Getting women to court requires such a step to be taken, and to be taken now. There is little point in improving the law on rape, which ought to encourage more women to come forward, if they are not given support when they do so. If what has been done and what is still to be done succeeds in getting women to court, what happens? At the moment, there is a 45 per cent. conviction rate for rape cases that arrive in court. For all other offences, there is a 73 per cent. conviction rate. In all judgments made, from the woman involved deciding whether to proceed, to the judgment of police on whether to proceed, to the Crown Prosecution Service deciding whether to proceed, what will happen in court plays a major part. The low conviction rate becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Clause 1 can make a significant difference in court. As most people are beginning to realise, 90 per cent. of rape is committed by people who are acquainted with the complainant—not by strangers. That means that, inevitably, the issue is consent and whether the defendant believed that she was consenting. It is to the second test that clause 1 brings a change.

At present, the second test is totally subjective. "Are you sure", the jury is asked, "that he did not, however unreasonably, believe that she was consenting?" Owing to comments made in the other place, I want to make it clear that the defence of believing in consent is always—I repeat always—run at court. Doubt was cast on that by some of their lordships. Such a defence is especially run since the admissibility of previous sexual history was limited in 1999 to supporting the defence of consent. The way to get round the prohibition is to run belief in consent because previous sexual history is still admissible in order to support it. If, in a rape trial, a man goes into the witness box and says, "She was consenting," which of course he must do in every case, the defence that he believed that she was consenting is automatically raised and the judge has a duty to leave that belief to the jury for its consideration.

The present law allows that to happen. A woman may say that she had sex forced upon her and protested at the time, and a jury can believe her. However, if the defendant says, "I'm sorry, I honestly believed that she was consenting," it is difficult to gainsay that and convict him. There is therefore a situation in which women have had sex forced on them, but no one is convicted. The current rule—I do not think that this is putting it too strongly—licenses the assumption of consent by the defendant, irrespective of the complainant's wishes. She, of course, has a duty to make herself clear, but in those cases she will have done so. He, however, has a duty to ascertain that the sex is mutually consensual, and the current rule does not impose such a duty on a man.

If the Bill is enacted with clause 1 in its current form—I compliment those who have had input in refining it and making it better in the other place—when the issue at court is whether the defendant believed that the complainant was consenting, he can still say that he did, but will now have to show that that was a reasonable belief. That will have an impact that goes beyond court cases—it will become a normative or standard requirement. Men who get to know about the rule will understand that they have to behave reasonably when involved in sexual relations and must ascertain properly that the woman is consenting. I have to say that that is not much to ask.

The structure of clause 1 is excellent because in assessing whether the defendant's belief is reasonable, all the circumstances have to be looked at, including a scrutiny of any steps that the defendant took there and then to ascertain whether the complainant was consenting or not. The requirement that the defendant is to be asked in court about the steps that he took to

ascertain consent will have another excellent impact on the way in which cases run in court. It will diminish the admission of previous sexual history to support an honest belief in consent. At present, for example, someone can argue, "If my friend told me something about her and what she likes, or if I heard it on the grapevine, that might have influenced me to believe that she would consent, and helped to close my mind to what was actually resistance."

Imposing a slight duty on the man to behave reasonably, and making him aware that he will be asked about the steps that he took, even though he believed that consent had been given, to check that his state of mind was correct at the time, ought to focus the court's attention much more on the situation in the bed, on the floor or wherever. What he heard about the complainant's previous sexual history and the way in which she might react if he approached her will be far less central to his state of mind at the time and, in many cases, will be so remote from the here and now that it will not be relevant enough to be admitted at all.

Clause 1, buttressed by clauses 76 and 75, is a good move in three ways. It has the two advantages at court that I have explained—first, it will require reasonableness, and secondly, it will diminish the admissibility of previous sexual history. Thirdly, it will establish a norm for the way in which men are expected to behave. Because it has that normative quality, it is important to publicise the change in the law if and when it occurs so that, in all fairness, men know that there is a further test and so that women are encouraged to appreciate that they have the extra protection provided by those first two changes.

Two years ago, I had a conversation with the then director of the major female equality pressure group in the UK and with a famous woman broadcaster—virtually a household name. We discussed whether we would report a rape done by somebody we knew. We were not convinced that it would be worth the cross-examination, perhaps about a fictional previous sexual history; the possibility of the man saying, "Okay, she didn't consent, she was protesting, but I thought she did consent," and being acquitted; or the thought of having to go it alone, perhaps with a disbelieving police force and a disinterested Crown Prosecution Service, facing the near-inevitability of an ultimate acquittal. We all agreed that if we had been raped by somebody we knew, we would not report it—middle-class, middle-aged, confident women like us. How much worse is the predicament for the less articulate, less confident, less secure younger women who live on the poorer estates—for example, in my constituency, Redcar?

When clauses 1, 75 and 76 come through, and the other good steps that I mentioned which the Government have taken start to bear fruit, and in particular if they drive forward the policy of rape support embodied by sexual assault referral centres, I think that reflecting on the position, I and my two friends would change our minds. We would say that it would now be worth making a report. It would not only change our minds but it would enable us to encourage those less advantaged women to do the same.

For those reasons, I believe my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has greatly taken forward the cause of justice for women through these changes to rape law. In fact, I can go a little further. For the women campaigners who have campaigned for the 27 years since 1976 to reverse the ruling in the case of R *v.* Morgan that allowed an honest, even if unreasonable, belief in consent to be a defence, there is a real possibility that this Home Secretary will become a feminist hero.

5.17 pm

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I add my congratulations to the Government. The Bill is welcome and, in many ways, overdue. It spent an inordinate amount of time in the other place. I am told that there is nothing that peers like quite so much as talking about sex. Clearly, that must be true, as they have been talking about it for six months. A peer recently said to me, "Don't hang on to the Bill for too long. We want it back."

That diligence has resulted in a Bill that is much better than the original. The improved wording of the clause on rape, which has been more than adequately described by the hon. and learned Member for Redcar (Vera Baird), will hopefully be more workable and result in more convictions. I was struck by the fact that the hon. and learned Lady said there was a 45 per cent. conviction rate. I do not know whether we have been reading different figures, but I read recently in a briefing by the Rape Crisis Federation that the conviction rate had dropped to 7 per cent. That may be from a different baseline.

Vera Baird: In respect of the cases that get to court, there is a 45 per cent. conviction rate. In respect of those where a complaint is made, there is only a 7 per cent. conviction rate, because there is a massive drop-out on the way to court.

Sandra Gidley: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for that clarification. I assumed that that was the explanation, but the briefing that I read did not make it clear.

People are happier with the rape laws as they now stand. The naturists in my constituency are happier. Some of the sillier initial suggestions, such as making it illegal to advise the under-16s on matters sexual, have long since disappeared. That does not mean that we in the Commons have an easy ride. There are still a number of aspects of the Bill that give cause for concern, and a number of small matters that seem to have been overlooked.

My main concerns about the Bill as it stands can be loosely summed up as relating to issues involving exploitation. Trafficking, offences against persons with a mental disorder or learning disability, and child sex offences all involve some measure of exploitation. If we as a society and as a Parliament fail to protect the weak and the vulnerable, we fail in our most important duty.

I share the sentiments of those in the Chamber today who seem to believe, as I do, that above all, we must protect our children. When I use the phrase "our children," I do not solely mean British children, as I include those who are victims of horrors such as sex tourism and trafficking. None the less, I should like to start off closer to home and examine the Bill as it affects many children this country. Hon. Members should bear it in mind that I also start from the premise that it is completely unacceptable for an adult to sexually abuse

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a child, particularly if they are placed in a position of trust. It follows that it is absolutely right that the Bill deals with such behaviour.

I share the concerns of the Chairman of the Select Committee on Health and the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), who find it deeply worrying that the Bill appears to criminalise the sexual activities of all young people, regardless of whether they take place with or without consent. In my kinder moments, I wondered whether I was seeing the dawn of a new age of joined-up government and whether such provision was the Home Office's contribution to reducing the teenage pregnancy rate by saying "It's simple: let's make it illegal."

The Health Committee's recent report on sexual health, however, highlighted some of the problems in the sex education that our young people currently receive and recommended that greater emphasis be given to relationships and sex education so that young people feel more comfortable and can discuss their sexuality in a non-sniggering manner. Sadly, I must conclude that we have not seen an example of joined-up government, as the measures in the Bill will serve only to reinforce the attitude that teenage kissing and experimental petting are somehow smutty and dirty and should be done behind the bike sheds—a place that has been mentioned already—almost as an underground activity.

Not all adults are comfortable with the idea that teenagers are sexually active, but we need to reflect on what is happening out there in the real world and ensure that our laws do not attract ridicule. The matter definitely needs careful review in Committee. Indeed, I thought that that was the case even before the magnum of champagne was offered. What we do not need is a law that cannot be enforced.

Other European countries have tackled the problem by decriminalising sexual activity between under-16s. I am not suggesting that we should necessarily take that route, as I am not convinced that it is the right way forward. Finland, for example, has taken a different approach. Sex with under-16s is not deemed an offence in Finland if there is no great difference between the ages or mental and physical maturity of the persons involved. That strikes me as the beginning of a pragmatic approach that we might consider. Criminalising consensual activity between adolescents devalues the suffering of genuine victims of child abuse. I strongly believe that we have to find some way of differentiating the two issues. The problem was acknowledged in Committee in the House of Lords, as it has been today. I think that the Government are well aware of it and I like also to think that they genuinely do not know quite how to take it forward in a practical way.

I was slightly alarmed that, on Third Reading, the Minister in another place proposed safeguards against inappropriate prosecution by suggesting that guidance would be issued by the Director of Public Prosecutions. Such guidance would be implemented by officials, who may have widely varying moral standpoints that will impact on their decisions. That does not seem fair to 15-year-olds throughout the country who are doing what 15-year-olds do naturally. I feel that we need to deal with that matter in the Bill.

I turn now to situations in which the vulnerability of a child is exploited. In particular, I welcome the attempt to deal with sex abusers who use the internet to groom. That issue has been more than adequately dealt with today and I shall not repeat what has been said; there is a huge amount of agreement in the House. I want to concentrate on an area of particular difficulty. While I call for common-sense measures to deal with the problem of consensual teenage activity, I believe that we have to admit that there is a darker side to life and that a number of child sex offences are committed by children and young people. Research shows that 25 to 40 per cent. of all alleged sexual abuse involves young perpetrators. Of 6,400 people cautioned for, or found guilty of, a sexual offence, 23 per cent. were aged between 10 and 21. It has been estimated that in 1994 more than 10,000 children were sexually abused by another child or young person. It is not a small problem, and we need the courage to tackle it. The law needs to protect innocent children from abuse, whatever the age of the abuser. We firmly believe, moreover, that abusers who are children cannot be dealt with in the same way as abusers who are adults. We recommend a child-centred approach to tackling the problem of young abusers, then rehabilitating them.

As a society, we must recognise first and foremost that children and young people are still developing both physically and emotionally. Children who abuse often do so because they have themselves experienced a form of sexual, physical or emotional abuse. It is a complex picture. We owe such children help and support, which must be of a specialist nature. It is inappropriate to treat those damaged children in the same way as adult sex offenders, because often they do not fully understand the consequences of their actions. That said, some children and young people do pose a risk to others, and their behaviour requires careful management.

In 2002, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children produced a report called "I think I might need some help with this problem", which concluded that Government policy regarding that group of children remained unclear and that services remained sporadic and largely unco-ordinated. In 1998, a report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons concluded that fewer than half of the 10 probation services inspected made any provision for juveniles displaying signs of sexually harmful behaviour.

We are in desperate need of a strategy and the resources to achieve it. It is disappointing that the Bill does not explicitly provide that assessment and treatment should be available on a statutory basis as soon as children and young people come to the attention of local authorities. We believe that assessment should be on a case-by-case basis—a one-size-fits-all policy is not appropriate, because the range of children and their problems is wide and complex—and that it should go hand in hand with an assessment of the child's need for protection. Those measures would ensure that the possibility that the child may himself have been the victim of abuse is taken into account and that the necessary counselling and support is provided. We shall table amendments to that effect in Committee.

Another area of concern, which I share with the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre, who is no longer here, is the sex offenders register, covered in clauses 81 to 93. It may not be right to force young people to register in

the same way as adults, even though there is a reduced notification period; we must think carefully about whether that is the best approach. There is a strong case to be made for putting the child or young person at the heart of the process and dealing with them individually. If the child has been abused, that must be taken into account before any decision is made as to whether to put him on to a sex offenders register, which will have a huge impact on a very young life in terms of family, friends, and education or work. It is not a measure to be taken lightly: it should be based on recommendations by trained professionals, who are the best people to decide whether the young person is a risk to the community. As the Government have been unwilling to address those issues in the Lords, we intend to raise them in Committee.

Many hon. Members mentioned trafficking. I pay tribute to UNICEF for its effective lobbying campaign on that subject. Again, I shall stress the most important points. There should be a distinction between adult and child trafficking. Most victims are 13 to 17, and that highlights the need for strong measures to deal with the problem. It should not be tackled in a magistrates court.

The Government are obliged under the United Nations convention on the rights of the child to protect the rights of vulnerable children. The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) listed all the protocols that reinforce that point and I shall not try hon. Members' patience by repeating them. The United Kingdom police stated that there are two main obstacles to prosecuting traffickers. First, there is a lack of a specific law—the Bill deals with that problem. Secondly, there is a lack of victims who are willing to testify. That obstacle will remain unless we change the Bill. The Government have a moral duty to protect innocent children but that is absent from the face of the Bill. Earlier, it was said that the four countries that provided periods of reflection and introduced strong measures to deal with the problem had the highest conviction rates. Perhaps the Minister will tell us in his winding-up speech the way in which the UK intends to match the conviction rates of countries such as the United States, Italy and Sweden if we do not provide the necessary period of reflection. Several pilots show that the Government have some commitment to tackling the problem. However, it would be useful if they could put on record their commitment to assessing the pilots and the subsequent implementation of any schemes as a result of recommendations from them.

We also support the case that the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) made for victim protection at the same time as the period of reflection, during which problems can arise. It takes time for the child to develop a relationship of trust with authorities, such as the police. Without time for trust to develop, it is impossible to get a prosecution. Even worse, children who are sent straight back to the country of origin are much more likely to fall into the hands of traffickers. To remain oblivious to that and claim that it is not our problem is a dereliction of duty.

I was delighted that the Government have already tabled amendments to deal with the problem of sex tourism. They would close the loophole that previously meant that those on the sex offenders' register who went on holiday for less than eight days could disappear to countries such as Thailand and Cambodia and abuse children there. I have visited Cambodia and witnessed the extent of the problem, and the amendments are welcome.

Abuse is also a severe problem for those with a mental disorder or learning disability. Clauses 32 to 46 deal with such offences. The charity Turning Point says that 1,400 people with learning disabilities are victims of abuse every year. Any law must be carefully drafted because it must recognise that people in that category have as much right as others to engage in sexual activity. However, that must be counterbalanced with measures to guard against exploitation by those in positions of trust and authority.

The charity Sense, which deals with deafblind people, raised some especially sensitive issues. It makes the point in a paper that it is difficult to provide sex education for a deafblind person with some form of learning disability without touch, which is fundamental. Sometimes there is no alternative. Are we to deny people in that category the benefits of some sort of sex education? The message must also be given to people such as these that they need to be able to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. It is beyond my skills to say how we should deal with this in practice, but it is worth keeping the issue in the back of our minds as the Bill progresses.

Some progress was made in the other place, but a number of issues relating to people with a learning disability remain outstanding. Of most concern are those relating to the capacity to consent. It is a puzzle to me and to many who work in the field that clause 32 uses the words

"unable to refuse because of a mental disorder or learning disability",

while the remainder of the Bill almost universally refers to "consent". To my mind, there is a fundamental difference between the two concepts, and I would welcome an explanation of the Government's thinking on this. Why cannot the wording in clause 32(1)(c) be altered to

"B is unable to consent because of a mental disorder or learning disability"?

We need to be consistent with the provisions relating to rape at the beginning of the Bill.

One interpretation of this matter is that the current definition risks people with learning disabilities being seen as never able to consent to sexual activity. I am sure that the Government have not done this intentionally, and that they will seek to put the matter straight in Committee. It would also be useful if the Government were to issue a code of practice, alongside the Bill, on the provision of sex education and therapy to people with learning disabilities. This would protect care workers who legitimately provide such services.

My other major concern surrounds the Bill's provisions relating to care workers. We wholeheartedly support the thrust of the amendments on those issues, but we are concerned that the definition of a care worker includes the phrase

"likely to"—

have—

"regular face to face contact".

[Sandra Gidley]

This could cause two problems. First, there is no provision for dealing with a care worker who abuses as a result of a one-off contact. The most obvious example that springs to mind is the use of agency staff, because many places are understaffed and need to resort to the use of agency staff from time to time. There need to be checks and balances in place in those circumstances. The Government have recognised this, but I am not sure what they plan to do about it. The second scenario is one in which abuse could be repeated on several occasions but over a long period of time, making such contact difficult to define as "regular". I flag this up as another issue that needs to be discussed in Committee.

I had hoped to complete the theme of protecting the vulnerable by mentioning rape, but the subject has already been dealt with. I have little to add to the comments made by the hon. and learned Member for Redcar , and I would like to give everyone else time to speak. We have here a Bill that could command support in most parts of the House. The Lords have performed a huge task in successfully making it better, and I look forward to working with other hon. Members to make it better still.

5.38 pm

Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. It might have been suggested that I, along with the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) and others, should expand our speeches ever so slightly. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister also realises how much time we have available. I welcome that, because my hon. Friend—to whose winding-up speech I look forward—will have as much time as he needs in which to address all the very relevant points that have been raised throughout what has so far been a very good debate.

Before I move to the main part of my speech, I would like to reflect on what my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) said about the support mechanisms that exist to assist the victims of rape in coming forward. If we cannot actually get them to come forward, we want them to be able to deal with the problem and feel able to come forward to receive treatment, counselling or the like. I did not originally intend to speak about that aspect of the Bill but having heard what my hon. and learned Friend said, I realise that it is a key issue. The Bill does not deal with it directly, but without the additional features referred to by my right hon. and learned Friend, some of the important measures that we pass may not be as effective as we want them to be.

I am a patron to the Zero centre, a rape crisis centre in my own constituency, so I well recognise the issues about which my hon. and learned Friend spoke. In my short time in the House, that centre—together with a sister organisation that deals with similar issues of family distress, rape and child abuse—has on several occasions been under threat from lack of funding. I am pleased to say that lottery funding has helped the Zero centre to get on its current firm footing. I greatly commend the work of such centres throughout the country. I also echo what my hon. and learned Friend said about the need for co-ordination between such centres so that women can have a one-stop shop for reporting incidents, medical assistance, counselling and so forth whenever they need them.

I greatly welcome the Bill. It has rightly been said by my hon. Friends that it has been a long time in the formulation. From my knowledge of the process, it started in the previous Parliament. I took part in a series of seminars at an early stage in the consultation process before the last election. I shall say more about definitions in due course, but at those seminars I was not filled with hope that we would reach this stage, mainly because the legal profession highlighted the major problems associated with redefining the law of rape.

The fact that we have reached this point from that small beginning is a measure of the determination and commitment on the Labour Benches—through my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, his predecessor and current Ministers—to keep the process in train. I have noticed various points during the past three or four years at which we could have run out of steam. That should make us reflect. As my hon. and learned Friend pointed out, 1976—20-odd years ago—was the second to last time that rape law was examined in a major way. Why? The key reason is that it is such a difficult area in which to legislate. That makes the present legislation even more welcome.

The Bill is in line with the Government's whole approach to legal and constitutional affairs. It sits well with our willingness to put victims first. Like other Members, I have had the pleasure of speaking to several such Bills, on the Floor of the House and in Committee. The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 put victims first in trying to get at the drug dealers when existing legislation was not as effective as it should have been. The Courts Bill 2002 is about modernising the courts to make them work better for victims. The Criminal Justice Bill 2002 is still going through Parliament, but will hopefully soon become an Act. There has been a series of measures and it is no coincidence that, under this Government, the commitment in the Home Office and the new Department for Constitutional Affairs to ensure that the court system works for victims is there for all to see. I want to talk about a particular set of victims, as my remarks are addressed specifically to part 1 of the Bill.

A series of seminars in 1999 led to the report entitled "Setting the Boundaries". What are the modern boundaries in sexual activity? Some activities are private, or involve consenting adults or people of the same sex, but the problems of definition are difficult to resolve. I am delighted to say that a measure of agreement has been reached.

I commend the back-room staff at the Home Office for the way in which they have brought this Bill and other measures forward. Had the process been handled less well, the degree of agreement evident in today's debate would not have been achieved.

The hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) pointed out where problems could have been encountered had the Bill not been as successful as it is—helped, of course, by the changes and amendments passed in another place. Even so, the hon. Lady made several criticisms of the Bill. I consider some of them to be misplaced and, if I am lucky enough to be a member of the Standing Committee, I hope that she and I will be

able to debate the matter. That just goes to show how much hard work it took to achieve the degree of agreement about the Bill that has been secured.

That hard work resulted in the White Paper "Protecting the Public", which was extremely well received. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) mentioned how many briefings hon. Members have received, and that shows how much interest the proposed reforms have aroused. The briefing from the Rape Crisis Federation caught my eye, as it deals with the idea of the female victim. If the definition of rape in clause 1 was badly wrong, that organisation would be the first to point it out. An inaccurate definition would compound the problem with the old law that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar detailed. I shall return to that matter shortly.

In my experience of dealing with sexual offences and serious crime before I was elected to the House I have seen juries deliberate on rape cases: I have seen how they react to rape victims and I have witnessed at first hand how problems that have been described in the debate play out in a court.

There is no doubt that the Bill is overdue. It is worth repeating, as has been noted already, that the change proposed in clause 1 introduces the idea that the belief is reasonable. I say that because of the awfully low conviction rate. Whether it is the 7 per cent. of cases reported, or the 45 per cent. that go to court, as against well over 50 per cent. for other offences—I think that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar said that it was 70 per cent.—that rate is atrocious.

It is atrocious for a number of reasons. It is a denial of civil liberties to that class of victim. One reason why there is a high drop-out rate is that the victims have no confidence in the system, which cannot be right. It cannot be right for us to think, as practitioners, which I used to be, or as legislators, that there is a class of victim that has no connection with or belief in the process that would secure justice for them in what is one of the most serious offences, which is a grave violation of a human being.

I think my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar said that it might be normative to make people reflect on their actions. I hope that that may be the case. I want to describe how it may impact on the practitioners in criminal courts and how they approach rape cases—how a judge and jury may better understand a rape trial.

On consent, one reason why there was a low conviction rate was that if that was the issue at trial, and given, as my hon. and learned Friend said, that most rapes are committed by someone the victim knows, which I believe to be correct, added pressure is placed on the jury. How do they differentiate between the case in question and the usual dealings between the two people. And how does the victim do that? Even a wife must be able to say no. In the past 10 years, the law has changed and a wife can now say no. We no longer have the Victorian attitude that, as part of the marriage contract, the wife has to say yes in every circumstance. In the sort of rape case that usually comes to court, involving people who know each other, the reasonableness test is classically designed to make the jury reflect much more strongly on the circumstances and the acts under review.

I have not been involved in many rape cases. The cases that I witnessed that resulted in acquittal brought to mind what older practitioners told me about murder trials when we had capital punishment, when a number of murder cases resulted in acquittals simply because if the jury said, "Guilty", the defendant would hang—it is not an exact parallel, but I hope the House will find it useful to reflect on it. In many cases, the verdict was manslaughter simply because the jury could not face the consequences of a guilty verdict.

In rape cases, there seems to be a sort of parallel. Juries would take the easy way out. I am obliged to the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins), who seems to be agreeing. It was the easy way out because of the way in which the law was framed—it might have been an unreasonable belief, but it was one that was honestly held. A more objective standpoint might have brought a different result.

It may be instructive for the House if I depart from my usual practice and remind hon. Members of a situation that illustrates the difficulty of securing a conviction under the law as it was. Again, I am grateful to the Rape Crisis Federation for its briefing. I hope that that organisation will forgive me for pointing out that one of the two case studies in the briefing was much less useful and convincing than the other.

In brief, the first case study concerned a 16-year-old girl whose mother heard her screaming in her bedroom. The mother found a man on top of her daughter having sex with her. The circumstances seemed to be that the girl met the man as she was coming home, worse the wear for drink. She could remember nothing about the evening. When the man was arrested, he initially denied meeting her but he was caught on closed-circuit television using his credit card, which linked him to the scene. He then came up with an amazing story, which the jury accepted. He said that he had bumped into the girl, who agreed to have sex with him later on the basis that he looked Italian. In his neck of the woods, it was well known among his mates that all girls said "yes" to a man who looked Italian.

I see that some hon. Members are laughing, but it was no laughing matter for the distressed mother and daughter in that case. The case study offers an almost ridiculous example of how someone charged with rape in such circumstances can maintain an honest, even though unreasonable, belief. Under the new law, the jury would have been asked to deal with a different set of questions.

The second element that I want to discuss is anonymity. I understand the arguments put forward by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), who is not in his place. The Opposition have concerns about anonymity and they would support a version of clause 2, which, I understand, was inserted by Lord Ackner in the other place.

I welcome the Secretary of State's assurance that the Government will amend the provision so as to take the sting out of it, although removal would be my preference. I say that because if a form of anonymity applied to a serial rapist to the extent that the public had less access to the identity of that offender, it would hinder the prospect of other victims coming forward to say, "Yes, I had contact with that person and he did the same thing to me, but I thought I was the only one, so I

[Stephen Hesford]

didn't report it. Now that I know that other women are coming forward, I am emboldened". That would change the case, but such a situation would be much less likely if there were anonymity. If the House is determined to make conviction for rape easier in the right circumstances, removal of anonymity would be the right way forward. I support the Government in that.

Finally, I want to turn to a slight amount of detail. In some senses, this has been mentioned before, but it is important and, again, if I serve on the Committee, we may return to it. I have not spoken about the important part of the Bill that deals with the protection of children. Some elements of the Bill are welcome, especially the new proposals on grooming and arranging or facilitating the commission of child sex offences

"in any part of the world",

but I want to be sure that we take a consistent line.

I ask the Government, in advance of the debates in Committee, to reflect on the fact that clause 15, entitled "Arranging or facilitating commission of a child sex offence", will apply only to offences under clauses 10 to 14, not to clauses 6 to 9, which relate to the very serious sex offences on children under 13. Clause 17, entitled "Meeting a child following sexual grooming etc.", deals with the same kind of issue, but the offence under clause 17 is aimed at

"an offence under this Part."

So the offence of meeting a child following sexual grooming is aimed at offences under clauses 6, 7, 8 and 9, which relate to the very serious sexual offences, yet the offence of arranging or facilitating the commission of child sex offences, which is more serious in some ways, is treated differently.

I shall give an illustration. In another branch of the law, it is often thought that theft is less serious than handling offences, which carry a greater maximum penalty because those offences often facilitate the theft—one is done for the other—and a parallel relationship is involved in arranging or facilitating the commission of a child offence: the arranging makes the offence more likely if someone engages in commercial activity of that type or something similar. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider the effect of the Bill, given that, first, there will be no life imprisonment for the most serious offences and, secondly, they will not be fully covered.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and his colleagues on introducing the Bill, which is in a usable form. It represents a major step forward in treating a special class of victim and in reclaiming civil liberties for females in a number of different circumstances. They can go out and have a drink if they want, without being accused of over-dressing outrageously or whatever, and people in domestic circumstances can say no if they want. The Bill will assist both classes of potential victim, and I commend it to the House.

6.3 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford) in the debate. As a former barrister, he brings great experience to this issue. It is always difficult speaking at the end of a long debate, such as this. I went home the other night and told my wife that I had just made a speech in the House of Commons and she said, "What was the point of that? I expect you sat there for six hours and then made all the same points that everyone had made before you"—very perceptive. I shall try to avoid doing that tonight.

Like other hon. Members, I welcome the Bill. It is right to codify and bring together the law on sexual offences. It is right to update the law, as the Bill does in a range of ways. It is also right to introduce the new offences that many hon. Members have spoken about, not least to keep pace with technology. Much has been made of the offence of internet grooming, and the hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who is not back in his place, spoke about it powerfully. The police have told me that they need changes in the law to keep up to date. Everyone in the House is clear that paedophiles, rapists, those dealing in child pornography and traffickers need to be hunted down and punished, and this Bill helps us to do that, which is why, I am sure, it has all-party support.

As a member of the Home Affairs Committee, I also welcome the way in which the Government have handled this Bill. They have listened at each stage: they listened in the other place, and they listened to the Select Committee report. We had some difficulty, as we were trying to conduct pre-legislative scrutiny while the Bill was in the other place, and we often found that we were dealing with a moving target—we would come up with a powerful argument, but it would not matter any more because the provisions had been amended. We came to many of the same conclusions as the other place.

It is also a difficult area because we are dealing with awful crimes, and we are also dealing with sensitive areas in which we must choose our words carefully. The Home Secretary gave us some good examples of that from the debate in the other place. It is worth saying, however, that what we are trying to do is criminalise that which is wrong. I hope, however, that the Government are also trying not to draw into the criminal law those things that are harmless but of which we may disapprove. One or two problems may still exist, such as those relating to clause 14 and 15-year-olds having a snog. I am not claiming that I am going to win the bottle of champagne, but it is nice to know that, under new Labour, it is a bottle of champagne and not a pint of lager, so we can all work on it.

The Home Affairs Committee looked in detail at three areas that I want to mention. The first issue was sexual activity in public, which was dealt with in clause 74 of the old Bill, but that clause has now gone. That decision was absolutely right, as the clause was far too widely drawn. It was in danger of making the law look an ass, as the Home Secretary said earlier. I hope that it will not be reintroduced to deal with the problem that the Government perceive in relation to sexual activity in public lavatories. It is worth remembering why the clause on sexual activity in public was included in the first place: it was an honest attempt to be comprehensive and gender-neutral. What happened was that we found that it would end up criminalising a couple of people in a car, halfway up a mountainside, having a fumble on the back seat. That was clearly the wrong result and that is why the Government rightly dropped the clause. I hope

that they will not reintroduce it in any form to deal with the other problems that they are having, as harmless activities should not be criminalised

The second area was the question of exposure and the concerns of British Naturism. I suggested that we bring in representatives of British Naturism to present evidence and answer questions, which it did extremely well. It had real concerns about the Bill, which have been partly dealt with, about which I want to make a few comments. British Naturism says that it has 20,000 members and that 2.5 million people in this country take part in naturist activities. While I was listening to the debate, I worked out that that is 5 per cent., which, if the House is representative, must include at least 30 Members. I can only think of one or two who take part—[HON. MEMBERS: "Name them."] I will not go that far, as I am just starting out. Calm down, as Michael Winner once said.

This matter was dealt with by clause 70, now clause 68. The old test as to whether one was guilty of this criminal offence was knowingly exposing oneself and being reckless as to whether that would cause offence, which was wrong. The naturists rightly said that sometimes one cannot know whether one is being reckless, as one cannot know the state of mind of the other person. In my constituency, people sometimes go punting along the Cherwell, and—for those who know Oxford well—when they reach Parsons' Pleasure, they sometimes find a few dons in a state of more than partial undress.

Mr. Malins: I remember it well.

Mr. Cameron: I am sure that my hon. Friend was in the punt and not on the bank. The point is that we should not criminalise that sort of behaviour. In addition, the test as it was drawn would have caught someone who was changing their swimming trunks on the beach and who tripped over—they would be reckless as to whether someone might see them and be caused offence.

The new test in the Bill is better. First, it is that one intentionally exposes oneself, and, secondly, that one knows or intends that someone will see and will be caused alarm or distress. That sounds much more sensible, and the naturists, including those from my constituency who have written to me, should be more relaxed about it. However, they are still not happy and I hope that the Minister will listen to them.

The naturists are still making two points. One is reasonable, the other less so. The less reasonable point is their request that there should still be a reference to sexual gratification—that is, that it should be a crime for someone to expose themselves only if they do so for that purpose. That presents a problem, because surely there are cases involving deliberate exposure to cause offence, but no sexual motive. That probably should be a criminal activity, so the suggestion is not helpful.

The second point has more merit. The naturists would like the test of a reasonable person to be introduced to the clause on exposure—that is, a reasonable person would be caused offence by seeing someone without any clothes on. The Criminal Bar Association gave evidence to the Home Affairs Committee—I refer the Minister to it—and it seemed to think that approach sensible.

The Select Committee sitting was a sketch writer's dream, as Members might imagine. I have referred to the point about British naturists all carrying passports saying that they are bona fide naturists, which caused the question to be asked, "Where do they keep their passports?" However, it came over loud and clear that those people are, on the whole, law abiding and not a nuisance. Their idea of fun might not be ours, but they have a right to be heard and listened to. I hope that the Minister will listen to their concerns in Committee, particularly the point that I have tried to put across.

The third issue examined by the Committee was rape and consent. The hon. and learned Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) made an excellent speech. She is a real expert on this. I will not repeat the figures that she gave on the dreadful rape conviction rate, except to refer Members to page 7 of the Home Affairs Committee's excellent report, which sets out in detail the number of alleged rapes taking place each year and the number going to court. That will give the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) the full picture, but the figures are truly awful.

It cannot be said too many times that this is a dreadful crime. That goes for date rape, stranger rape and any sort of rape. Also, it is absolutely right that the Government have a target for getting the conviction rate up. As the hon. and learned Member for Redcar said, that should be partly about police work, partly about improving the record of the Crown Prosecution Service, partly about reforming how the courts work and partly about encouraging people to come forward.

I am not going to get into the debate about anonymity, as I do not think that I agree with what the Select Committee said about it, but we must remember that what is right is anonymity for the person who has been raped. One of the reasons for introducing that was to encourage people to come forward, which is absolutely what we should keep.

It is difficult to get to the bottom of the crime of rape and work out exactly what happened between two people, but, as the hon. and learned Member for Redcar said, it has not become five times more difficult, yet that seems to be what has happened to the conviction rate—it has got five times as bad. In this context, we must ask ourselves how much a change in the law will address the problem of the conviction rate. I agree absolutely with the hon. and learned Lady about clause 1, which is the right way round the Morgan case. The clause says that reasonable belief in consent has to be shown. It will not be good enough to say, "I thought that she consented." The hon. and learned Lady was extremely clear about that.

However, less clear are clauses 75 and 76, which set out the so-called rebuttable presumptions, when it is presumed that consent is not given. Clause 76 deals with conclusive presumptions, when it is conclusively proved that consent is not given. If that sounds complicated, that is because it is complicated. It was even more complicated before the House of Lords got at it.

[Mr. Cameron]

Our report says that

"Clause 78"

as it then was

"was probably the most confusing provision in the whole Bill . . . the drafting was cumbersome and attracted much criticism from judges and lawyers."

The measure has been improved but I hope that in Committee the Minister will think about the concern about complexity. Rebuttable presumptions, which are made when one presumes that consent was not given, will apply if violence was threatened or if a person was trapped in a room. One might say that it would be common sense to reverse such a presumption of consent. There are only two narrow conditions for conclusive presumptions. For example, if a rapist impersonated another person, the Bill states that it must be conclusively presumed that consent was not given.

I am not a lawyer but I served on the Committee that considered the Criminal Justice Bill. When there were previous changes to criminal law such as to the rules of hearsay, to the rules on previous convictions and to the right to silence – a change made by the Conservative Government – the argument was made that the court should hear all the evidence and that a jury in an open court should be trusted to reach the right decision – we should let the dog see the rabbit, as it were. However, the rebuttable and conclusive presumptions about consent seem to write into law detailed provisions on how a judge should direct a jury.

I showed the Bill to a criminal QC this morning, and he said that there is a danger of introducing complexity with no added value. I want the Minister to think about that when the Bill reaches Committee. Let us consider what would happen if Miss A, the victim in a rape case, said that someone impersonated another person.

Stephen Hesford: I am listening with care to what the hon. Gentleman is saying and I understand his perspective. From a practitioner's point of view – I tried to address that in my speech – if the presumptions work and are workable, more guilty pleas might well be entered for such cases because defendants would not be able to see a way out. That is why the provisions might come into their own.

Mr. Cameron: I am about to address precisely that point. If the hon. Gentleman is right – I have an open mind about that – we should go ahead with the provisions as drafted. However, he should think about this possible situation. A victim could say, "My attacker impersonated someone else and then threatened to hit me," but the defendant could say, "I didn't impersonate someone else and I didn't threaten to hit her." Under the Bill, I understand that the judge would have to say to the jury, "If you believe that he was impersonating someone else, that is a conclusive presumption that no consent was given, and if you believe that he threatened to hit her, that is a presumption that on balance no consent was given. However, if you don't believe those things, you take a different view about consent." The provisions will make judges undertake a complicated process of explanation. What we really want is a jury to consider the case and decide that if the defendant impersonated another person, obviously there would be no consent. The provision is an attempt to write down common sense.

Let me quote what Mr. Rook of the Criminal Bar Association said about the proposals:

"What you are doing here is putting judges into strait-jackets, if you like, legislative strait-jackets, where they have to go through these various directions. So, in those circumstances, we feel that actually the importance of a clear summing-up may be lost because of having to go through these assumptions, shifting burdens of proof and so on."

I admit that he was talking about the provisions before the Lords amended them, but the measures are still rather complex and the Minister must have a think about them.

I do not think that I shall win a magnum of champagne from the Home Secretary, but attention must be given the Family Planning Association's question of whether the Bill will make kissing a crime for 15-year-olds – it is not actually just kissing that is at issue, I think that the Government would call it kissing plus. The problem is not clauses 10 to 13 but the relationship between clause 14 and clauses 10 and 11. I thought for a moment that the answer might lie in clause 14, which says:

"A person under 18 commits an offence if he does anything which would be an offence under any of sections 10 to 13 if he were aged 18."

I thought the solution might be to ensure that that does not apply in the narrow circumstances of clauses 10(1)(c) and 11(1)(c) when both individuals duly consent. The problem is, however, that there is no concept of consent for under-18s. The hon. Member for Romsey mentioned what happens in other countries, and that may provide the answer. We could also consider the suggestion by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) for a common-sense provision to state that nothing in the Bill should criminalise what a reasonable person would think of as normal behaviour.

In sum, good law should march with common sense and we should criminalise what we know to be wrong. There is still a danger of trying to be so comprehensive that we sacrifice some common sense and draw things into criminal law that should lie outside it. I know that the Government are listening to our points. I hope that with their good will in Committee, we will ensure that the Bill becomes good law.

6.20 pm

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I, too, welcome the Bill. The intention to protect individual adults and children, and the updating of legislation to reflect today's society and attitudes, are to be applauded. As we have seen from today's news, it is essential to provide effective protection against crimes such as those stemming from the internet.

We also owe an enormous debt to our noble Friends in the other place who spent so many hours scrutinising the Bill. On the whole, they have made it much more workable. The co-operation there shows us how Parliament can work well and our constructive debate augurs well for Committee. However, concerns do remain. In touching on a few of them, I shall try not to be repetitive.

It is important that people across the spectrum of sexuality are treated equally under the law. What consenting adults do in private is their own affair. Children and people with mental disabilities should be dealt with appropriately. The human rights of victims and the accused should be protected. I want to restate our position on anonymity. I am convinced that we need to change the way in which people's lives can be destroyed by the media, even though a charge may never be made against them. That does not apply just to rape cases, but to child abuse cases and many other offences, too. There has to be a balance if someone whose identity is protected makes an allegation that just may be entirely false. If the accused is never charged, there is no possibility of the individual being publicly vindicated by an acquittal.

It is right to r[illegible]use 2 in Committee and to consider the case of w[illegible]sses, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) said. I hope that the Government will not simply try to delete the clause, but instead will listen both to the conclusions of the Home Affairs Committee, which suggested that anonymity of the accused be protected for a limited time, between allegation and charge, and to those who conclude that there should be anonymity until the point of conviction. I hope that with a spirit of co-operation in Committee we will get the right balance between the need to protect potentially innocent suspects from damaging publicity and the wider public interest in retaining free and full reporting of criminal proceedings, including the benefits that that publicity can bring by encouraging other victims to come forward.

Liberal Democrats welcome the measures to protect children from sexual abuse, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) said, there are concerns about how the Bill treats young people. Publication of the children at risk Green Paper before the debate would have helped our discussions. I hope that it will be published before we discuss the Bill in Committee so that we can use it as a basis on which to build.

Although I welcome the approach to protecting children from abuse, there is a danger of criminalising children for innocent activities on their part. We know that sexual activity between the ages of 13 and 16 is fairly common. Surveys show that it is as high as 30 per cent. for males and 26 per cent. for females. We must accept life as it is today, although it is of course important that precautions are taken against unwanted pregnancy and advice on the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases is provided. Yes, we must be concerned if kissing and petting become a criminal offence.

I was rather struck by the statement made by my noble Friend Baroness Walmsley in the other place when speaking on this issue. She said that there is a paradox: the Bill stipulates that a child under the age of 13 cannot understand the implications of sexual activity sufficiently to consent to it, but can simultaneously be expected to understand its implications sufficiently to be held criminally liable for it. There is much that we need to consider carefully and sensitively in Committee.

Along with other Members, I hope that someone wins the champagne. It is essential that we try to amend the Bill to reflect the real lives and needs of young people today. We will badly let them down if we leave the Bill in a mess. We must ask ourselves whether it is necessary to criminalise normal adolescent behaviour in order to achieve our overall objectives.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey pointed out, between 25 and 40 per cent. of all sex offences against children are perpetrated by juveniles. I should like to reflect on a very sad case that was brought to my attention in one of my surgeries. I shall call the person David, although that is not his name. David's parents came to see me. About 17 years ago, it was identified that David was experiencing a difficult adolescence. Perhaps he and his parents were struggling to come to terms with his emerging homosexuality. The parents commissioned a psychiatric report, which concluded that there was no danger of him harming anybody. Subsequently, he was fined £10 for a minor sexual assault. At the age of 19, he was convicted of a serious offence against a 10-year old. Thirteen years on, he is still in prison in the north and has no hope of release.

I was in frequent communication with the Minister's predecessor about the matter and I am sure that I will be so again. We must realise that lack of early identification and treatment led to tragedies for two families. That brought home to me the need to recognise that there are always two sides, and to work on the preventive side. Although not all words will be appropriate in the Bill, we must carry that culture with us.

Many points have been made, but I am running out of time so I shall end by addressing the issue of trafficking. I, too, congratulate UNICEF and all those who have worked in the area. Just a short time ago, I was privileged to be taken to Moldova with UNICEF representatives. There, sadly but usefully, I learned a huge amount about the trafficking of children and women. I saw the problems of trying to overcome trafficking due to huge poverty and the tremendous push factor, the like of which I had never seen. Even when young women were returned to Moldova and helped in a refuge, they were still likely to return to trafficking if given the chance – just as we would buy a lottery ticket. What a tragedy.

We in the western world – the destination countries – have a responsibility to bear. I therefore welcome the fact that there are clauses on trafficking in the Bill, and that so many hon. Members have ably put all the points that need putting on the issue. I hope that we can change the approach to the problem and try to do something about it. The way in which UNICEF has raised awareness of the issue must be applauded, as must the Robbie Williams film and so much more.

So much can be said and we have an awful lot to do in Committee, but overall I welcome the Bill and look forward to the careful consideration of the detail.

6.29 pm

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): This has been an interesting and thoughtful debate, with helpful and constructive contributions from Members on both sides of the House. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and other hon. Members in welcoming the Bill, which is a thoughtful, wide-ranging and coherent piece of law in the making. We all agree that it left the other place a much better Bill than when it arrived there. Credit for that is due in part to the Government – their approach has been helpful and

[Mr. Humfrey Malins]

constructive throughout the passage of the Bill but also to peers in the other place. I wish to mention in particular my noble Friend Baroness Noakes, who took a thoughtful and eminently sensible approach to controversial issues in the Bill. She, like many other Members of the Lords, offered wise and reasonable arguments and amendments. The House owes her and the other place a debt of gratitude. It also owes a debt of gratitude to the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Select Committee on Home Affairs. I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) has done on the latter Committee, including his work on this issue.

We have had a good debate, with contributions from Members on both sides of the House. The hon. Members for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) and for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), who have experience in the field, both tackled the issue of traffickers and unaccompanied children, and referred to the vulnerability of young persons and their exploitation. Their contributions were helpful for the House, as indeed was the contribution of the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), who made a speech about similar issues.

We need to revise and reform the law on sexual offences, much of which was made in a different era when attitudes towards sex and personal relationships were very different. The world is also very different, especially in terms of travel and technology. However, having accepted the need to change the law, we must accept that the fundamental principles of our criminal justice system, which were right in the past, continue to be valid today. Any reform must have regard to those principles.

I shall touch on a few issues on which further debate and perhaps amendment is needed in Committee. Before I do so, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) for his contribution. He talked about sexual offences against children and paedophile activity on the internet. The taskforce greatly appreciated everything that he said and contributed to its work, and we look forward to his expert help as the Bill progresses through Committee. Before leaving the issue of trafficking, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) for his powerful speech. He, too, referred to the significance of the issue, rightly praised UNICEF and spoke about the importance of training immigration officials.

Clause 1 is a vital provision, and deals with the issue of rape, that most grievous offence. I very much agreed with the hon. and learned Member for Redcar (Vera Baird), who talked about the vital need for support for victims in this area of law and practice simply to enable more cases to come to fruition, so to speak. She was right to stress the importance of that issue, and spoke, in my respectful view, very helpfully indeed about the law on consent generally, on changes in society, and on the difficulties that we face in relation to that. She rightly referred to the Morgan case, which tells us that in a rape trial the defendant's subjective belief that the victim consented to sexual intercourse affords him a defence, even if he has no reasonable grounds for that belief, and pointed out problems arising from that.

The hon. Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford), who is a barrister by background, also referred to the matter, which has been troublesome. The Bill brings before the House a change for the better—an understandable change. What was first suggested in the other place was not so good, but as the Bill has progressed, we have reached a stage where, even if we do not find clause 1 entirely satisfactory, we know that we are on the right lines, and we can discuss the clause constructively in Committee.

I wonder whether the new reasonableness test can be improved. Concern has been expressed by a number of knowledgeable groups, including the Bar Council, that the new test may not let in for consideration the defendant's particular features—his characteristics including, for example, his youth or his mental health. We may need to examine that. *[Interruption.]* I may have said something wrong and I could be in serious trouble, but I will press on, as I shall not be barked down by the Home Secretary's dog.

I come briefly to clauses 76 and 77 and the presumptions about the absence of belief in consent. It was pointed out in another place that there may be some gaps in the provision. It can be a little unwise to list circumstances giving rise to a particular situation, because inevitably one leaves out other circumstances that may be relevant. In the context of clauses 76 and 77, physical violence and the presumptions, we may have to consider in Committee the possibility of economic threat, which is sometimes as powerful as physical violence or more so—for example, a comment such as, "I'm not going to pay your rent any more unless . . ." or other abuses of a relationship of power. That aspect merits sensible discussion, but I am pleased that round the House today there has been a spirit of constructive debate. There is a real prospect that we can take these matters forward.

I shall make a general point about rape. I am conscious of time, and the need to enable the Minister to have proper time to respond to the debate. It is a sad fact of life that the drug that results in many rapes and on so many occasions when informed consent may be in doubt, and the drug that causes many instances of women's lives being damaged beyond repair, is alcohol. Sadly, heavy binge drinking, in the past associated with young men only, is rapidly becoming fashionable among young women. Increasing numbers of young people of both sexes drink regularly to excess and often have little or no memory of what went on the night before. That makes for difficulties for juries, who have to make judgments about situations that were alcohol-dominated and poorly recollected. It is an issue in life that troubles me considerably and of course brings much grief to many people.

I understand the problem that clause 14 seeks to address, but is it the right way to do it? The clause, I think—I hope I will be corrected if I am wrong—makes criminals out of two 15-year-olds, both aware of each other's age, who with the consent of each other engage in sexual touching and no more than that. If they are guilty, they are liable to conviction on indictment to five years' imprisonment. The hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre expressed concern about that, as did the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Witney. My hon. Friend also rightly expressed some of the concerns of naturists about another aspect of the Bill.

What about clause 14? The Home Secretary was extremely helpful in his opening speech. In response to an intervention from the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), he may have said that he was considering a formulation and that no one would be prosecuted in the circumstances outlined by his hon. Friend. He said, in effect, that he came to the matter with good will, which I know he does, and that he is prepared to consider the issue. *[Interruption.]* I am prompted to remember that he also offered a magnum of champagne. If he adds a bottle of gin, I shall have the answer by 10 pm.

Mr. Bryant: It is alcohol that is the problem.

Mr. Malins: It is a problem among young drinkers. If I qualify as a young drinker then, as Clint Eastwood might say, "You've made my day."

Clause 14 is troublesome. One must consider the increasing maturity of girls and the way in which young people experiment. One is tempted to be flippant, but I do not want to be. Does anybody remember the back row of the cinema, where 14 and 15-year-olds would have a little bit of fun falling well short of an activity that might be thought harmful? Such young people will face five years on indictment under the clause if they are taken to court. It is a shame that that is the case. Yes, we have some sort of duty to send messages to teenagers about how they behave and to say that having sex at too young an age is wrong, but youngsters are growing up and they will experiment.

I am worried that if the clause were enforced, it would send an unhappy message to worried teenagers and parents. Even a decision by the Crown Prosecution Service or the police not to prosecute could be taken only after the child had already been traumatised by a series of questions from somebody, perhaps under caution. That is a tough experience to put a 15-year-old through. I feel unhappy about the clause, but I shall say no more at the moment except that we hope to return to the matter in Committee.

I am bound to say that clause 10 also troubles me a little. It provides that somebody who is just over 18 commits an offence if he touches sexually a person under 16. I am a little troubled by an aspect of that provision. If a mature 15-year-old girl and an immature 18-year-old boy engage in some form of sexual touching, falling short of intercourse, with mutual consent, it is odd that they should be subject to a clause providing that the guilty person will be guilty of an offence that carries 14 years on indictment. There will be no prospect of being tried in a magistrates court – it is on indictment. We need to consider that provision, as the criminal law is not the best tool to deal with teenagers having consensual contact falling short of intercourse, which is part of growing up and experimentation.

Time is against me, Madam Deputy Speaker, so I shall move past three excellent pages of my speech and turn very briefly to the latter part of it. We all agree that abusing a position of trust for the purposes of obtaining sexual gratification must be punished and taken seriously. It is right to punish such activities, as a position of trust must not be abused. A relevant parallel is theft, which is a criminal offence, but is heavily aggravated when it involves a breach or abuse of trust, as this offence should be.

Let us take a look in Committee at the list of areas of abuse of trust. Let us consider what happens to the sports teachers in the summer holiday camps and the young man who leaves his school in the summer term aged 18 and goes back in the autumn term in his gap year, still aged 18, as a part-time games teacher and starts, when he is potentially in a position of trust, a relationship with a sixth-form girl whom he has known all his life but with whom he has not previously had a relationship. That is a small Committee point, but I believe that we would do well to consider it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield spoke about the anonymity of the defendant in rape cases, which is an important issue, as did the hon. and learned Member for Redcar. The hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) also made helpful remarks about the anonymity issue. Some, like the Bar Council, believe that the anonymity of the defendant should remain until conviction, rather than until charge. There are strong views on that and I understand that they have been expressed. It is a matter that is well worth considering further, and we shall do so in Committee.

For my part, I think this has been an enjoyable and constructive debate. I look forward to the further passage of the Bill and thank all hon. Members for their contributions.

6.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): I begin by thanking all hon. Members who contributed to this excellent debate. I am pleased with the level of agreement that we achieved, because a mature consensus is vital as we try to devise legislation that strikes a balance between the need to protect children and vulnerable adults and the aspiration, which we all share, to continue to live in a free and open society.

In a powerful and generous speech, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) referred to a number of matters that he hoped we would be able to discuss in some depth in Committee. He talked about the abuse of positions of trust, the need for a range of appropriate penalties, and the inclusion of visual images in the range of child pornography. I am sure that those and many other issues will be discussed: the hon. Members for Woking (Mr. Malins) and for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) added to the list. As regards the magnum of champagne, I propose that if we manage to crack the problem, we should share it among all members of the Committee.

In a powerful speech, the hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) urged those of us who will serve on the Committee to root our deliberations in the reality of abuse. The knowledge that he brought to bear will stand us in good stead if he, too, serves on the Committee.

Sexual crime and the fear of sexual crime have a profound and damaging effect on the lives of individuals and communities, and it is the responsibility of Government to protect everyone in society from such crimes, especially those, such as children and persons with a mental disorder, who are particularly vulnerable to abuse. I appreciated the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), who spoke strongly in favour of exercising that responsibility.

[Paul Goggins]

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford) for highlighting the hard work and dedication of many people who worked behind the scenes on introducing the Bill not only campaigners, Members of Parliament and Ministers, but hard-working officials.

The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) reminded us of the important role that is played by Select Committees in the development of ideas and the framing of legislation; I thank him for the work that he and his colleagues have put in.

We believe that the new framework of sexual offences, notification requirements and orders in the Bill will provide the protection that we need. Part 1 is a major piece of modernising law reform. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) reminded us that much of the existing law in relation to sex offences goes back to the Sexual Offences Act 1956, which was itself largely based on 19th-century legislation. The Bill represents a timely review and much-needed legislation. The current law does not reflect the major changes that have taken place in our society over the past 50 years, and it is widely considered to be inadequate and out of date. The Bill will modernise the law and provide an effective response to the new dangers that we face in today's world.

Several hon. Members raised the issue of consent, which is central to establishing whether a sexual offence has taken place. It is vital that the law is crystal clear about what consent means and in what circumstances sexual activity is simply unacceptable. Our changes to the law on consent will provide juries with a clear framework within which to make fair and just decisions. It is not enough for a defendant to hold an honest belief that someone consented to sexual activity; the Bill makes it clear that that view must also, given all the circumstances, be reasonable.

My honourable and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) asked my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in an intervention whether the rape drug would be included in the list of presumptions in clause 76. I confirm that we are considering that.

The Rape Crisis Federation and the Campaign to End Rape have endorsed the Bill's aims and robustly defend it as a feasible and important advance for women in the justice system. I endorse the remarks of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar to the effect that legislation alone is not enough. We must do far more to develop support systems and ensure better investigation of rape cases and better case preparation. I was especially impressed by my hon. and learned Friend's remarks about the sexual assault referral centres, and I intend to visit one of them before we reach Committee stage. I was about to give my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary some news, but I believe that he already heard it before returning to the Chamber. It is that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar described him as potentially a feminist hero.

Mr. Blunkett: That is a first.

Paul Goggins: Indeed.

Many hon. Members mentioned anonymity and my right hon. Friend made it clear that, in Committee, we intend to overturn clause 2, which grants the same right to anonymity to defendants as to complainants. Of course, we understand the distress that can be caused to people who are accused of a serious offence, especially when they are subsequently acquitted. Nevertheless, we have an open justice system and the fact that someone has been charged with a serious offence can sometimes encourage more victims to come forward.

The disclosure of personal details before charge is especially worrying. My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) and the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) raised that issue. We are in discussion with the police and the newspaper industry about tightening up the existing guidelines on disclosing and reporting the names of people under investigation. Again, in a spirit of co-operation, we should be pleased to hear ideas from any hon. Members about the way in which to tighten the guidance further and make it effective.

Simon Hughes: We accept the work that the Government have done and are continuing to do. Does the Under-Secretary accept that there is genuine scepticism about whether guidelines will work, because they have not in the past, and that it may be necessary to have a stricter framework that would make it illegal to go public about prospective charges against people?

Paul Goggins: The issue has been widely discussed and has implications that go beyond the Bill. It is our job to ensure that the Bill works. In that spirit, we shall try to tighten up the guidelines in the way that I outlined.

Overall, we profoundly hope that tightening the law on consent will deal with the justice gap whereby only 5.8 per cent. of reported rapes currently end in convictions. The Metropolitan police involved in Project Sapphire told us that they believe that the proposals on rape will enable us to secure more convictions and get more justice for victims.

The Bill plugs several loopholes in existing law. For example, hon. Members may remember the case last year of an estate agent who managed to convince two young children to undress in front of him. One of the children told her parents what had happened and they went to the police. To everyone's consternation, no offence could be found with which to charge the man. Clause 11 therefore introduces a new offence of

"Causing or inciting a child to engage in sexual activity".

It carries a maximum penalty of 14 years' imprisonment.

The Bill also deals with discrimination and removes from the law on sexual offences discrimination against homosexuals. Several hon. Members made that point. Some existing offences criminalise consensual sexual activity in private against men that would not be illegal between heterosexuals or women. I confirm that we are considering a system whereby those who engaged in consensual acts with 16 and 17-year-olds and have been convicted of buggery or indecency can be deregistered.

The Bill ensures that everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, is treated equally by the law. The new offences will help to protect the public, especially those groups that are actively targeted for abuse, such as children and adults with learning disabilities.

Paedophile grooming of children, especially online, has been mentioned by many hon. Members, and is an increasingly high-profile area of concern. We must be

ready to respond to the new challenges that are posed by the advances in technology. That is why we are introducing the new offence of grooming in clause 17, which will make it an offence to use the internet to groom a child and then arrange to meet them with the intention of engaging in sexual activity. I can reconfirm that the penalty for this offence will be up to seven years' imprisonment.

This new offence would have been relevant in a recent case involving a man who met two young girls online in an internet chat room, subsequently communicated with them by mobile phone, then met them and engaged them in a variety of sexual acts. Furthermore, although we do not know the full facts of the case of Shevaun Pennington, this is probably the right moment for me to add my comments to those of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) on that case, and to reiterate our hopes for her safe return.

The sexual offences review that preceded the drafting of the Bill heard disturbing evidence about the extent and nature of the targeted sexual abuse of people with a mental disorder or learning disability. I know that all hon. Members will be distressed to learn that research has estimated that the incidence of abuse among persons with learning disabilities is much higher than it is among the general population. There is much to suggest that those with a mental disorder are targeted for sexual abuse by offenders because the offenders believe that their victims will not be able to give credible evidence against them.

Existing legislation offers inadequate redress when such people are sexually abused. First, current offences use demeaning and outdated language, requiring the prosecution to prove that the victim is a "defective". Furthermore, this offence carries a maximum penalty of only two years imprisonment. The Bill will provide additional protection for such people, while recognising the right of people with a learning disability to enjoy a full life, including a sexual life. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) spoke powerfully on that issue, drawing on the experience of the daughter of a friend of his.

Several hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow, welcomed the steps that we are taking to strengthen measures to combat the sexual exploitation and trafficking of children. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre spoke of the West Sussex safe house, and the good work that is being done there. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North spoke powerfully about the need for support for victims, and both she and the hon. Member for Tatton mentioned the need for time for reflection. We appreciate the principle behind the need for time for reflection, but we believe that having a set period might be too inflexible. We would prefer an approach that was tailored to an individual's needs.

The hon. Member for Mole Valley is clearly very knowledgeable on these issues, and spoke to us about encryption. I hope that we shall have further opportunities to learn more about that in Committee. I would like to reassure the hon. Gentleman that clause 13 will cover causing a child to watch a sexual act, which will include looking at photographs. I hope that he will be encouraged to learn that we are considering extending this provision to cover other visual representations.

Now we come to the kissing question, or, as we may come to refer to it in our further deliberations, the champagne challenge. Almost every hon. Member commented on this issue, and concerns were raised that the Bill would criminalise teenagers under 16 who, as part of their normal development, engage in kissing. That is not the intention of the Bill; nor will it be its effect in practice. Strictly speaking, sexual activity between under-16s is already illegal, because the age of consent is 16. It would be irrelevant that both people were under 16. There have, however, been no prosecutions simply for kissing; nor will there be in future. I would say to the hon. Member for Romsey that if we find no other way to deal with this question—if we do not win the magnum of champagne—we shall be able to trust the Crown Prosecution Service to ensure that that intention is followed. The Bill will, however, ensure that, when one young teenager seeks to exploit or abuse another, we shall be able to act. The protection of children must come before all else.

When sexual crimes occur, the law must provide justice for victims and penalties for perpetrators that reflect the seriousness of the harm caused. The Bill demonstrates our commitment to doing both, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

SEXUAL OFFENCES BILL

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002].

That the following provisions shall apply to the Sexual Offences Bill [*Lords*]:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

2. Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 14th October 2003.

3. The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

4. Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

6. Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

7. Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of any message from the Lords) may be programmed.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

The House divided: Ayes 320, Noes 140.

Division No. 291] **[6:59 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul

Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dan *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Bridget Prentice and Vernon Coaker

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fallon, Michael
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Opik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Syms and Hugh Robertson

Question accordingly agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): We now come to motions 4 and 5.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Terms and Conditions of Employment

That the draft National Minimum Wage Regulations 1999 (Amendment) Regulations 2003, which were laid before this House on 19th June, be approved.

Government Trading Funds

That the draft Land Registry Trading Fund (Extension and Amendment) Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 19th June, be approved.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Question agreed to.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made,

That—

(1) at the sittings on Wednesday 16th and Thursday 17th July, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any Message from the Lords has been received and any Committee to draw up Reasons which has been appointed at that sitting has reported; and

(2) at the sitting on Thursday 17th July, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until he has reported the Royal Assent to any Act agreed upon by both Houses.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT, CHANGES: AMENDMENTS TO STANDING ORDERS

Motion made,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 94 (Scottish Grand Committees (questions for oral answer)) be amended in line 2 by leaving out the second 'Scottish' and inserting 'Scotland';

(2) Standing Order No. 103 (Welsh Grand Committees (questions for oral answer)) be amended in line 2 by leaving out the second 'Welsh' and inserting 'Wales';

(3) Standing Order No. 119 (European Standing Committees) be amended in the table in paragraph (6), as follows:

(a) in line 5, by leaving out 'Transport, Local Government and the Regions' and inserting 'Transport; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister';

(b) in line 12, by leaving out 'Lord Chancellor's Department' and inserting 'Department for Constitutional Affairs (excluding those responsibilities of the Scotland and Wales Offices which fall to European Standing Committee A)';

(4) Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended in the Table in paragraph (2), as follows:

(a) before item 1 insert

'1 Constitutional Affairs	Department for Constitutional Affairs (including the work of staff provided for the administrative work of courts and tribunals, but excluding consideration of individual cases and appointments, and excluding the work of the Scotland and Wales Offices and of the Advocate General for Scotland)

(b) leave out the item relating to the Lord Chancellor's Department inserted on 27th January;

(c) in item 16, leave out 'Welsh Office (Office of the Secretary of State for Wales (including relations with the National Assembly for Wales))' and insert 'Wales Office (including relations with the National Assembly for Wales)'; and

(5) the Order of 5th November 2001 relating to Liaison Committee (Membership) be amended, in paragraph (2), by leaving out 'Lord Chancellor's Department' and inserting 'Constitutional Affairs'.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 17th July, the Motion for the Adjournment of the House in the name of the Prime Minister relating to matters to be considered before the forthcoming adjournment may be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours, and shall then lapse if not previously disposed of.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

PETITIONS

Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy

7.15 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Reflex sympathetic dystrophy is an intense, nerve-based, pain-causing condition, which, if not identified early and given alleviating treatment, may become irreversible.

Thus, the petition states:

The petition of Miss Amy Crumpler, Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy sufferer and some 1,800 others of like disposition declares that a medical recognition of Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy is urgently needed due to the lack of understanding and treatment of current fellow sufferers. The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons publishes appropriate medical guidelines to be followed throughout the United Kingdom when both diagnosing and treating Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy.

And the Petitioners remain etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Zoe Evans

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to present this petition, which deals with a matter of great poignancy. Schoolgirl Zoe Evans from Warminster was murdered by her stepfather, Miles Evans, in 1997. A tariff has yet to be set for that offence. The petition has been organised by *The Wiltshire Times*.

The petition states:

To the House of Commons

The Petition of 627 Persons, mainly resident in West Wiltshire.

Declares that a minimum prison sentence should be set for the killer of Zoe Evans at the earliest opportunity so that her family can finally have peace of mind.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons demands that the Home Secretary ensures that minimum sentences are set without further delay and that the case of Zoe Evans is considered expeditiously.

And the Petitioners remain etc.

To lie upon the Table.

RAF Lyneham

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn. *[Charlotte Atkins.]*

7.17 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Before I say anything about the potential closure of RAF Lyneham, it would be appropriate to pay tribute to the airmen and airwomen of the base, who, in their Hercules planes, have played such a central role in almost every conflict of the past 60 years and in every humanitarian effort in which we have taken part during that time. They pride themselves on being the first in and the last out in every conflict. As recently as Operation Telic in Iraq, we have seen what superb work they do. We are proud to have them in Wiltshire. We like the Hercules flying over my constituency and we shall be disappointed and extremely sad to see them go when they are moved to Brize Norton, as the Under-Secretary of State has announced they will be.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me advance notice of his intention to announce last Friday the closure of the base. I reconfirm that it was not me who leaked that decision to the press. It became known the following morning, although it was already common knowledge at the base. Two weeks previously, when I attended the Classics on the Wing concert at the base, the Chief of the Air Staff, among others, talked about the likelihood of closure. I did not leak the information. I go to great lengths to respect the fact that decisions should be announced in this place and I am grateful to the Minister for that advance notice.

It is rare for an event of the magnitude of the closing of a base such as RAF Lyneham to hit a single constituency. Some 700 directly employed civilians will lose their jobs. It is disappointing, incidentally, that the Minister's letter refers to only 250 job losses, then, in parenthesis, it refers to all those who are employed on contract. A total of 750 will lose their jobs, and 2,500 RAF jobs will go. Those people will not be moved to Brize Norton; there will be a 2,500 reduction in the net manpower of the RAF when Lyneham closes. Of course, a large number of support industries of every kind in the surrounding area will be affected. If all the people in those jobs are added together, plus their spouses and their families, about 10,000 people owe their livelihoods to RAF Lyneham, so the effect of the Minister's announcement should not be underestimated.

We believe that what is involved is a £75 million contribution to the local economy and, that if not handled correctly, the closure of RAF Lyneham will be absolutely catastrophic, not only for the village of Lyneham itself, but for the surrounding towns: Wootton Bassett; Calne, which is the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram); Cirencester—and my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) is here this evening; Chippenham, of course; and Malmesbury. People from all those surrounding towns depend to a significant extent on RAF Lyneham, so I very much welcome the opportunity provided by this Adjournment debate to begin to consider how to handle the announcement.

I should say in passing that the people of those towns took comfort from the fact that the Prime Minister visited the base some time ago and that, subsequently, in answer to an oral question that I asked him about the future of the base on 7 May, he said:

> "I accept and understand the very important role that it has played in previous conflicts and, I have no doubt at all, will play in future conflicts, too." – [*Official Report*, 7 May 2003; Vol. 404, c. 688.]

The people of Lyneham took great comfort from those remarks, which were made in this very Chamber. It now transpires that either the Prime Minister did not know what he was talking about, or he chose deliberately to mislead the people of Lyneham. Either way round, it is pretty poor stuff.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman wishes to rephrase that.

Mr. Gray: I will happily rephrase. The Prime Minister gave me an assurance – that is how I read what *Hansard* says – that Lyneham has a future in all future conflicts. If he was badly briefed and got it wrong, that is a matter for him. I have previously suggested raising in a point of order the question of whether the Prime Minister, wittingly or unwittingly, misled the House, and I suggest that he might like to come to the House to apologise personally for having done so. He has chosen not to do so, but it remains my view that while he said the base had a future, that is demonstrably not the case. I hope that you will accept, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I am not accusing the Prime Minister of misleading the House; I merely suggest that he was extremely badly briefed in saying what he said. That is perhaps the most charitable interpretation that any of us can possibly put on it. The truth of the matter is that the base is to close, and the Minister has made that plain.

We have previously engaged in a long debate about the future of Lyneham. We have argued about the basing of the A400M and whether or not it is sensible to have all our military transport eggs in one basket at RAF Brize Norton. I pay tribute to Sam Wright, Len Moore, Colin Quaiffe, and Councillors Allison Bucknell, Chris Wannell and Toby Sturgis, all of whom have fought a valiant campaign to save Lyneham. I also pay tribute to the 17,000 who signed a petition to that effect.

We produced a learned dossier. I am pleased to say that it was an entirely original dossier; we thought it up entirely ourselves and spared no effort on it. We even thought that we had achieved prime ministerial support, but Treasury cuts prevail, as ever, and what will be will be. The Treasury has spoken: Lyneham must close. That is a possible catastrophe for my constituency, but the Minister has taken his decision.

I should therefore like to take this opportunity to move from discussing whether or not the base should close. That is a disaster, a catastrophe and a huge strategic mistake in respect of the future defence of the realm, but it will happen, and I should like to say a few words about what we can do to mitigate the possible disaster for my constituency and to suggest ways in which the Ministry of Defence might like to help.

[Mr. Gray]

First, I should like to clarify the time frame and the likely process of the closure. Will the Minister tell us in responding to the debate when the C-130Js will leave? In his letter, he says that that will happen in about seven years. Am I right in thinking that it will happen in about 2010? It would be useful if the Minister would confirm whether that is indeed the year when the C-130Js will leave Lyneham and go to Brize Norton.

Will the hon. Gentleman tell us how many C-130Ks will be left by then? Clearly, if only a handful were left—two or three, for example—there would be no purpose in keeping the base open after 2010. Who would want to keep a base open for two or three planes? It may even be beneficial to know what will happen when the Hercules have gone. We do not want a largely derelict base, left in the middle of my constituency for a lengthy period, with two or three planes on it. At what stage will the Minister consider the airbase to be unviable? Does that change depend on the in-service date of the A400M, which, to say the least, looks a little questionable, as it has so far not even been designed, far less started to be built? In that case, will the Minister accept that there is at least the possibility of some slippage in relation to the in-service date, and therefore in relation to the date on which Lyneham is vacated?

We need to know all that, because the one thing about which we must be absolutely clear is that we cannot allow an extensive period of wind-down dereliction. When the RAF leaves, local people want a scheme for the economic regeneration of the base to be put in place immediately. We do not want, as I have seen at a number of other military bases in and around my area, a period of dereliction, often of a number of years, before something is put in place.

Similarly, will the Minister say precisely what discussions he is having with other military users about potential use of the base? In particular, what discussions is he having with the Army? Is there a possibility that the Army may use the base? I suspect that local people would prefer further military usage in the future rather than conversion to other use, but we need to know with some degree of clarity what the likelihood is that it will be used for some other military purpose. In these days of manoeuvrability and the ready deployability of services, perhaps there is a role for Lyneham, with its runways, in a rapid reaction corps and as an Army base for deployment at short notice. Will the Minister let us know what he can about those discussions with the Army? Alternatively, are they largely paper discussions, in which case, again, it would be useful, from the point of view of local people, to be absolutely plain about whether there is some military purpose for the base?

Leaving that on one side, it is important that we lose no time in coming up with and implementing an agreed vision of what we would like to see at Lyneham after the military have left. To that end, I have established a Lyneham taskforce, which met for the first time on Friday. It consists of councillors of all three political parties, as well as officers from Wiltshire county council, North Wiltshire district council, Lyneham parish council and Wootton Bassett town council, from the Wessex association of chambers of commerce and Wootton Bassett chamber of commerce, and from the Federation of Small Businesses, the regional development agency and the Swindon and Wiltshire economic partnership. It is therefore a very useful group of people, who have already got together to start to plan what we want to see on the base after the RAF goes. I hope that the Minister will confirm tonight that he would be content to see officers or officials from the base or from defence land taking part in that taskforce, too. Will he assure us that we can have the maximum amount of co-operation from the Ministry of Defence on matters such as looking at the level of contamination on the base, the buildings that will be left after the RAF leaves, and some of the economic appraisals made during the basing study of the last 12 months, some of which might be useful from the point of view of the taskforce?

Similarly, the taskforce has already established the need to appoint a number of consultants to consider some of these aspects. Am I right in thinking that the Ministry of Defence, or perhaps through the Minister's good offices—other Departments, might be ready to provide some support to the taskforce in carrying out some of those consultancy tasks? Will the Minister let us know what assistance and co-operation he will be ready to give to the people of the area in mitigating the worst effects of his announcement?

That taskforce is getting together immediately to consider what we want Lyneham to look like by 2013. It is already clear that we do not want it to be a dormitory new town, although some housing, especially low-cost housing for local people, is perfectly possible. We must have decent employment land. In the area, in recent months, St. Ivel at Wootton Bassett has closed, with 240 job losses, Lucent has closed, with about 500 job losses, Dyson has moved 500 of its jobs offshore to Indonesia. And Vodafone in Swindon laid off 500 people last week. The area therefore has something of an employment crisis. We need high-quality manufacturing employers to come in, and it seems to me that making use of some parts of Lyneham might have a role to play in that. I hope that other parts of the base might return to agriculture or leisure use of one sort or another. Will the Minister reconfirm, however, that he is ready to support our efforts, perhaps with other Departments, to alleviate the worst effects of his announcement?

While the Minister's announcement of a withdrawal from Lyneham is without question most unwelcome and a potential catastrophe for the local area, we should be grateful for clarification on two or three matters in particular this evening. First, what is his detailed estimate of the date by which the site will be vacant, which we need to know with some degree of clarity? Secondly, what discussions is he having with the Army or others about alternative military uses for the site, and will he sanction full co-operation by MOD officials with the Lyneham taskforce to come up with a suitable alternative vision for the base and surrounding areas?

There is no doubt about the fact that this is a sad day for Lyneham, but let us be clear about the fact that, as the local constituency MP, I am determined to drive matters forward to secure the best possible outcome for my constituents and to try to turn a potential catastrophe into an opportunity. The economic and environmental circumstances of Lyneham in 2013 must be at least as good as they are today, and I hope that they will be better. I intend to make it my business to ensure that that is the case.

7.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) on securing the debate, as it gives me the opportunity to outline the reasons why the Government have taken the decision to relocate all air transport and air refuelling assets to RAF Brize Norton and, as a result, to close RAF Lyneham by 2012.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I begin by acknowledging the valued role that RAF Lyneham has played over the years, most recently with its significant contribution to Operation Telic. I am glad of the opportunity to thank all the personnel and those who live around the station, whose support is much appreciated. I do not underestimate the part that the station has played in the past, and will indeed continue to play for some time to come.

The hon. Gentleman knows that the strategic review work that considered the future role of RAF Lyneham, RAF Brize Norton and RAF St Mawgan, has taken over a year. Phase 1 of the review was to decide the optimum basing for the A400M, which will replace the C-130K fleet currently at RAF Lyneham. The hon. Gentleman will recall that in August 2002 my right hon. Friend the Minister of State announced that RAF Brize Norton would be the home to that new fleet.

Phase 2 of the review was to consider the longer-term future for all three stations. It is a result of that work that the Government announced in a written ministerial statement on 4 July that RAF Lyneham is to close. That means that the C-130J fleet will move to RAF Brize Norton in 2009. That was the first question that the hon. Gentleman posed. Under that plan, the whole C-130K fleet will remain at RAF Lyneham until it goes out of service in 2012. The hon. Gentleman also asked about the A400M, whose in-service date is expected to be 2011.

We have consulted with the trade unions throughout the review, and a formal period of consultation is now well under way. The decision to close RAF Lyneham has not been taken lightly. The reason why the review team took as long as it did was to ensure that all issues had been fully considered. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that the review was indeed comprehensive. He will recall that the review team briefed him and has taken part in meetings with local and regional authorities in order that all the issues could be identified and considered.

I also know that, in coming to this decision, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State has given full and proper consideration to all the factors involved. It is never easy to close any unit, but we would be failing in our duty if we did not make the best use of taxpayers' money to meet the defence requirement. To keep a station that is not required to meet the defence need would be a waste of public money. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree.

Of course, we are all quite naturally concerned about the impact on the people working at and in support of the station. The impact on personnel and the economy was not overlooked in the review—it was an important consideration. What the hon. Gentleman seems not to understand is the fact that with the new, manpower-efficient aircraft coming into service towards the end of the decade, there would in any case have been a reduction in the number of personnel required. Of the overall post reduction of 2,140 MOD personnel, 1,560 of those would have been lost with the arrival of the new aircraft. The net job losses relating to the closure of RAF Lyneham amount to about 580, of which 180 are MOD civilian posts. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that we should keep the older, less efficient fleets just to maintain the current job numbers. As our experience of recent operations shows, air transport and air refuelling are key enablers of the successful deployment and use of our forces. The Government have put in place a modernisation plan for the air transport and air refuelling fleets that will ensure that we have more capability at lower annual cost.

The Ministry of Defence always tries to do its best for its people, which is why we made the announcement as early as possible so that everyone had the maximum possible notice of the change. There is worry that the way in which the hon. Gentleman's press release was issued last week, and other factors, might have affected some of the staff. I understand that the result of his contact with local press was that staff might have heard of the decision through the media ahead of the formal announcement in the House. That has been the subject of correspondence between him and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, and I think that enough has been said on the issue.

Mr. Gray: The Under-Secretary has made the most bizarre remark. Incidentally, it is disappointing that the Minister of State has not come to the Chamber today to face me and talk about the issue. I made it plain a moment ago that I made no comment at all to the press until precisely 11.30 on Friday 4 July, in Lyneham village hall. I turned down visits from the "Today" programme and a variety of other people. I issued no press release of any kind whatsoever. If the Under-Secretary is suggesting that I somehow leaked the matter, he is wrong and should withdraw that suggestion.

Mr. Caplin: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State wrote to the hon. Gentleman on 14 July and said that the hon. Gentleman believes that

"this information was given to the media by someone at the base. Clearly, it is impossible to establish the truth or otherwise in this."

I am able to confirm that no service personnel will be made redundant as a result of the decision. The early announcement will allow our recruitment planners to take account of the reduced manpower requirements, and personnel will be redeployed as necessary. We anticipate that some of the 280 MOD civilian staff who currently work at RAF Lyneham will be found alternative MOD employment. As the closure draws nearer, we shall reduce staff numbers through natural wastage. Of course, I cannot rule out the possibility that some civilian staff might have to be made redundant but if that is the case, they will be appropriately compensated and looked after. That measure, in addition to the fact that the area is one of relatively low unemployment, should help to mitigate the economic effect.

The hon. Gentleman's press release accused the Prime Minister of making a substantially misleading remark at Prime Minister's Question Time. That allegation was completely without foundation—he repeated the

[Mr. Caplin]

accusation in the debate. The Prime Minister said on 7 May that he had no doubt that RAF Lyneham would play a role in future conflicts. At the time, no decision had been taken—my right hon. Friend the Minister of State had not even seen the final recommendations arising from the review. Moreover, even now that the decision has been taken to close RAF Lyneham, the Prime Minister's statement remains true.

Mr. Gray: I asked the Prime Minister:

"Does he also agree that all future conflicts will equally depend on RAF Lyneham?"—[*Official Report*, 7 May 2003; Vol. 404, c. 688.]

The Prime Minister replied that he had "no doubt at all" that Lyneham would play a role "in future conflicts, too." There was a clear implication that Lyneham would play a role in all future conflicts. If the Prime Minister did not know about a decision that would affect 10,000 people's livelihoods on 7 May, that says an awful lot about the relationship between the Ministry of Defence and No. 10 Downing street.

Mr. Caplin: I am afraid that intervening sometimes does not help the hon. Gentleman's case. Why he thinks that the Prime Minister should apologise for, or come to the House about, a statement that was absolutely true is beyond me. Indeed, perhaps the hon. Gentleman should apologise for stating in his press release on 4 July that the Prime Minister gave an assurance that the base would not be closed. The Prime Minister's statement to the House on 7 May clearly gave no such assurance. The hon. Gentleman has decided to interpret it that way for his own constituency benefit.

I shall explain why the decision has been made. In the Adjournment debate on the 26 February last year, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State made the point that the review was driven not by the need to make financial cuts, but by the need to identify the best and most cost-effective basing arrangements for the new fleets. Despite that assurance, I note again that the hon. Gentleman stated in his press release that the decision was driven by financial cuts. He repeated that tonight. I stress that that is not the case. Indeed, I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware that in the recent spending review, the Government provided for the largest sustained increase in defence spending for 20 years. We all know that it is the Tories who plan to slash public spending by 20 per cent. if they are ever elected to government again.

It is essential that the Ministry of Defence regularly reviews what it needs to meet the defence requirement, and this review was a part of that ongoing process. The review was needed to consider how best to accommodate the new fleets. Planning for the future is what any good business would do and it is our duty to the taxpayer to ensure that we only spend what we need.

The hon. Gentleman has also questioned the amount of money spent on the infrastructure at RAF Lyneham over the years. Does he believe that we deliberately underinvested in the station to make its closure more inevitable? If he does, he is simply wrong. All strike command stations have been treated equitably for such spending. Expenditure on infrastructure is authorised according to the urgency of the work and each station is required to prioritise its spend in accordance with specified criteria, the foremost criterion being work required to meet statutory requirements. In fact, for many years, additional money has been made available to support work on the Lyneham estate. There is no question that RAF Lyneham has in any way been singled out over the years for inequitable treatment.

The hon. Gentleman asked about working with local authorities and what he described as the Lyneham taskforce. Ministry of Defence officials would be happy to co-operate with such a taskforce. I understand that consultation is taking place with trade unions, which I think he said are involved in that taskforce, and others. All consultation and discussion will take place before closure in 2012.

I understand that the announcement of the closure of RAF Lyneham will be disappointing news for the dedicated military and civilian personnel at the base who have contributed so much to recent operations. I take nothing away from the excellent work that has been done at Lyneham over the years. I recognise, too, the disappointment that will be felt by those in the area who give the station so much valued support.

RAF Lyneham has a long and proud history. However, I am sure all concerned will understand that we must make best use of defence resources. Part of that equation is looking closely at the bases we need in the long term. Locating the RAF's air transport and air refuelling fleets at a single station will increase the efficiency of our operations and allow more efficient and modern working practices to be implemented.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 16 July 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

The Deputy Prime Minister was asked—

Electoral Pilots

1. **Mr. Colin Challen** (Morley and Rothwell): If he will make a statement about local electoral pilots. [125859]

The Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Fire (Mr. Nick Raynsford): For the 2003 local elections we approved a wide range of pilots, 33 involving all-postal ballots and 17 involving e-voting pilots, which covered in total some 6.4 million electors. The initial headline results are encouraging; the average turnout for all-postal pilots was close to 50 per cent., and where there was e-voting about a fifth of voters opted to use electronic methods. We are now awaiting the Electoral Commission's detailed evaluation, which we will want to consider carefully and to which we will respond in the autumn.

Mr. Challen: I welcome my right hon. Friend's reply because it shows that the pilots are finding new ways to get people involved in our democratic processes. I urge him, however, to read early-day motion 174, in my name, which refers to the potential for fraud in electronic voting methods. There is evidence from the United States, where some of those systems have been used extensively, that there are no proper controls or means of verifying whether fraud or other deficiencies have occurred. The Government need to read that early-day motion very carefully.

Mr. Raynsford: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the benefits of pilots that appear to be turning around the decline in participation in elections. All Members of the House should welcome the evidence that a number of the pilots have been very successful in increasing turnout.

I agree also that it is vital to have safeguards against the risk of fraud, and I can assure my hon. Friend that the electronic voting systems used in the pilots all include measures to provide the audit trail required to verify that any ballot paper has not been altered or lost. We are absolutely clear about that. Looking at his early-day motion, I have to say that we are not convinced of the merits of a paper audit trail, which could undermine the security and secrecy of the ballot and prove unnecessarily bureaucratic. However, we are committed to proper audit and control systems, and we will be looking carefully at the Electoral Commission's recommendations.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): We all want to see an increase in turnout, but we do not want it to be achieved on the basis of "vote early, vote often". Many returning officers, and professionals from all parties, have expressed worries about vote rigging in all-postal ballots. Detective Chief Inspector David Churchill of West Midlands fraud squad said that

"the current electoral system is based on trust and that trust is being eroded ... The new postal voting system provides an opportunity for malpractice."

Now that the pilots have been in place for some time, what lessons about fraud has the right hon. Gentleman learned, and what measures does he intend to introduce to tighten the procedures to ensure that we preserve the sanctity of the ballot box?

Mr. Raynsford: We are absolutely committed to ensuring that the ballot remains as secure against fraud as possible. The hon. Gentleman will know that any electoral system is potentially open to fraud, and it is essential that there are safeguards. That is why, for all the pilots that we have run, we have ensured that there is proper evaluation, and particular attention has been paid to any allegations of fraud, which have all been investigated. The Electoral Commission is considering that in its report, which we expect to receive on 31 July, and we will obviously give a full response when we have received its recommendations.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): Will my right hon. Friend look not only at the issue of declining participation, but at that of declining electorates? He will be aware of a parliamentary question that I tabled recently about a massive drop in the size of the electorate in more than 100 seats in the United Kingdom. Some of those decreases are unaccounted for. Will my right hon. Friend look into the reasons for them? Seventy-five of the decreases are in Labour seats.

Mr. Raynsford: We are in regular discussion with the Electoral Commission about measures to ensure that the registration system for elections is as thorough and accurate as possible. We certainly share my hon. Friend's concern to ensure that there is no unjustified decline in the number of people registered to vote, as those who are not registered are consequently denied their entitlement to vote. We shall certainly continue to do all that we can to ensure that there are effective electoral registration measures.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): May I endorse the notes of caution sounded by the hon. Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Challen) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles)? Does the Minister accept that the vote is indeed a precious possession and people should regard it as such? We should think of the people of South Africa and how they responded when they first had the vote.

Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that we do not devalue the importance of the vote by making the process too easy and therefore open to abuse?

Mr. Raynsford: I do not believe that making it easier for people to exercise their democratic right devalues the process. It is important to ensure that proper safeguards are in place to uphold the integrity of the ballot. However, in an age when people are much more used to responding quickly to a variety of other transactions, using electronic or postal means rather than going in person to an office, it seems logical that the same principle should apply to voting. It is right to give people a greater opportunity to vote by post and electronic means where appropriate safeguards are in place. I hope that the hon. Gentleman shares our satisfaction with the evidence that we are beginning to turn the corner in terms of participation, because declining participation in elections should deeply concern us all.

Fire Service (Wales)

2. **Mr. Wayne David** (Caerphilly): If he will make a statement on the implications of fire service reform for fire services in Wales. [125860]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Phil Hope): The fire and rescue service White Paper published on 30 June makes clear our commitment to devolve responsibility for the fire and rescue service in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales. We will ensure that devolution is consistent with broader emergency and civil contingency arrangements, and that the capacity for a UK-wide response to any terrorist threat, or other threat, is maintained. In the meantime, we will discuss with the National Assembly for Wales and the Local Government Association how best to deliver the robust regional management arrangements that we consider essential to deliver the modernisation of the fire and rescue service.

Mr. David: I thank the Minister for his reply and for his commitment to sorting out the present shambles of the fire service. Will he reinforce that commitment by confirming that we will have nothing less than a fire and rescue service that saves more lives and reduces the number of injuries?

Phil Hope: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks. He is concerned that we have the best organised fire and rescue service. Implementation of integrated risk management plans will mean deployment of resources based on risk to life rather than building density. The need to refocus the fire service from intervention to prevention to help save more lives is at the heart of our White Paper.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I very much welcome what the Minister says about devolving the fire service to the National Assembly. That is right and proper as part of the process of devolution, as it has been called. Will he say a little more about two matters? First, will the pay and conditions of firefighters be devolved, and how will that work in a devolved structure? Secondly, will the financing of the fire and rescue service in Wales be done through the Barnett formula or alternative arrangements?

Phil Hope: Pay is a matter for local government employers. The Welsh fire and rescue authorities receive revenue funding for the service they provide from the principal councils within each brigade area. In turn, those councils receive revenue support from the National Assembly. However, the financial implications of devolution will be considered as part of wider discussions on the transfer of functions. My officials are in discussions with their counterparts in the Welsh Assembly to take the matter forward.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): Will my hon. Friend acknowledge that in most rural areas of Wales, including Monmouthshire, the fire service is provided by the retained fire service? Many of those firefighters work full-time as well as working for the fire service. What improvement in the pay and conditions of the retained fire service will come about as a result of the recent modernisation?

Phil Hope: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the important role that retained firefighters play in the fire service not just in Wales and rural areas, but across the country. The fire and rescue service White Paper spells out our commitment to ensure that retained firefighters and full-time firefighters get better pay and conditions. We have agreed a modernisation agenda, linked to pay, that will greatly improve the pay and conditions of those firefighters over the next two years.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Following on from that answer, there is difficulty in getting 24-hour cover in rural areas in Wales because of the problem of attracting retained firemen. Part of the solution is to encourage more women to participate in the service. Do the Government have plans to encourage more women to fulfil that vital public service?

Phil Hope: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. We want a fire and rescue service that more closely reflects the communities that it serves. We want more women recruited, trained and deployed as firefighters in all ranks and to carry out all roles that firefighters are asked to play. The new role of firefighters—the focus on prevention—will, I think, attract more women to the fire service, where they will be involved fully in all the roles that every firefighter will be expected to perform under the modernisation procedures.

House-building Programme

4. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): What plans he has to increase the national house-building programme; and if he will make a statement. [125862]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): The national house-building programme is for 2.2 million houses, of which 930,000 houses are planned in the London, south-east and midlands areas by 2016. The step change that I announced to the House in the recent sustainable communities plan identified the fact that a

further 200,000 new homes in London, the south-east and the midlands were needed to meet the high demand, and that represents a 20 per cent. increase.

Michael Fabricant: I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his answer. On 9 June, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when making a statement about the euro, spoke about the need for extra housing over and above both the current supply and the Department's plans. How will the Deputy Prime Minister respond?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Chancellor initiated the Barker review to look at the mismatch in housing supply and demand. Indeed, there was a breakfast meeting this morning with all the stakeholders. We are clearly concerned to see what we can do, not only about house numbers within sustainable communities, but about the relevance of that matter to the debate on the entry into Europe to which the Chancellor referred.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Under the previous Administration, there was chronic under-investment in housing, but we have doubled investment. However, will my right hon. Friend consider the problem of overcrowding? I took one of his predecessors to see a family of 16 people who are living in two bedrooms. Will he review the overcrowding standard that dates from the 1930s and further increase investment in housing?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to point out the problem, particularly in her constituency, of high demand and low levels of social housing, which was made much more difficult by the right-to-buy facility introduced at a cost of £40 billion in subsidies. We are changing those priorities, and more resources are being provided, as the step change demonstrates. However, I will not kid my hon. Friend—a considerable number of extra houses, both rented and new housing, need to be provided, and we are doing as much as we can to meet that demand.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Does the Deputy Prime Minister accept that his ambitious plans for house building will fail miserably unless there is a huge increase in the number of trained construction workers? Does he acknowledge that the Construction Industry Training Board estimates that in the next three years we need an extra 76,000 trained workers to enter the industry in each year? Why, therefore, has the Government's flagship scheme "Ambition: Construction" trained only 171 people in its first year?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has a real point about the problem of training in the industry, which has existed for decades. It is a real problem, and we have to find a solution, but I am not sure that the solution is to abolish the Department, which is the Liberals' policy. However, the hon. Gentleman is quite right—construction is the one industry that still has a levy for training and still fails to provide enough trained people, whether builders, plumbers, electricians or other kinds of workers. The 175 people to whom he referred are taking part in training that is a return to the old kind of apprenticeship system, and we want that to continue. However, it will not meet the demand for housing or provide all the skilled labour that is required, which is why I am putting a great deal of emphasis on off-site manufacturing of houses—£250 million has been provided this year solely for houses built in that way. That relieves some of the pressure on the demand for skilled labour.

Colin Burgon (Elmet): Does my right hon. Friend agree that any effective house-building programme should have at its heart the effective use of our brownfield sites? Bearing in mind his recent visit to the millennium village at Allerton Bywater, does he agree that that is a classic example of building on brownfield sites better to protect our green fields?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. I enjoyed my visit to Allerton Bywater, which is on an old pit site and is one of the millennium villages that we planned. The site is difficult, but they are making great progress there, and I was very encouraged when I saw it. I noticed also that it has increased the green belt in that area. Using brownfield sites and increasing the green belt is in line with our policy.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Can the Deputy Prime Minister explain why, in the seventh year of this new Labour Government, house building is now at such a level that it led the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee to come up with a shocking statement in a recent report? It says:

"The number of homeless households in temporary accommodation is now the highest ever."

How can that be under this Government?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I take the hon. Gentleman's point about the Select Committee. I do not always agree with every analysis by every Select Committee and we have exchanges about that, but the hon. Gentleman is on to a fair point about the increase in homelessness. We inherited a difficult problem, as he recognises. Under the previous Government's housing policy, half a million homes were repossessed, 1.2 million households suffered from negative equity, there was a £19 billion backlog in local authority housing, and the Government's priority was £40 billion to subsidise the right-to-buy scheme. We had to change that. We are increasing the housing supply; we have reduced bed-and-breakfast accommodation and homelessness—

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): It has got worse.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Well, in a number of areas there has been an increase, but I can show that in the period since 1997 the position has improved. Under both Governments, not enough has been done. We have not provided enough houses. That is why we have embarked on a step change in the policy.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: We are now in the seventh year of the new Labour Government, and the situation has got substantially worse. The same departmental Select

Committee report states that we need to deliver an additional 35,000 affordable houses. How will the Government do that?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The step change seems to be a change in the Leader of the Opposition. We have had to reverse the situation. We have increased the number of houses being built and an ambitious programme is under way. We have dealt with the backlog of unfit housing—800,000 houses have been improved. We have a target to improve 1 million houses in a 10-year period, and we are on course to achieve that. We are improving rented accommodation, refurbishing council house estates and building new houses, but, as I have told the House time and again, it would be better if we could get a consensus on improvement, rather than the party-politicking that the hon. Gentleman obviously wants to pursue.

Social Inclusion

5. **Linda Perham** (Ilford, North): If he will make a statement on the role of his Department in promoting social inclusion. [125863]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Yvette Cooper): The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister works with other Departments and local agencies to address the problems faced by deprived areas, in particular to tackle problems highlighted by the social exclusion unit. There has been important progress, including, for example, a 10 per cent. drop in teenage pregnancies over the past three years.

Linda Perham: What message can my hon. Friend give to local authorities such as the London borough of Redbridge, run by the self-styled party for the vulnerable, which has abolished cabinet responsibility for social inclusion and torpedoed the project for promoting social inclusion?

Yvette Cooper: I am sorry to hear that the council has not taken social exclusion seriously. There are unjust inequalities in this country. It is not fair that people's chances in life should depend on where they live and what jobs their parents do. There are a series of investment programmes to tackle social exclusion, including sure start. Wise local government works with those programmes, not just because they are good for those on low incomes, but because they are good for the whole community.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does the Minister agree that one of the best ways to promote social inclusion is to incorporate affordable housing in high-income housing developments? Is she aware that significant numbers of developers are evading their planning obligations by building small, exclusive developments under the 14-house threshold? Will she address that anomaly urgently?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue, of which the Government are aware. There are discretionary powers for local government in that regard. It is an important matter that needs to be addressed. That is why the Government have a wide programme to promote affordable housing and housing for key workers in particular areas.

Decent Homes Target

6. **Mr. Andrew Love** (Edmonton): What progress his Department is making in meeting its decent homes target. [125864]

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): I am pleased to inform the House that the 2001 English house conditions survey report, published yesterday, shows that we have reduced the number of non-decent homes in the social sector by more than 700,000. When we came to power in 1997, we inherited a situation where there were about 2,300,000 non-decent social sector homes. Forward plans from local authorities show that we expect to meet our target of a one-third reduction by next year, and we are on track for all dwellings owned by local authorities and registered social landlords to meet the decent homes standard by 2010.

Mr. Love: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that the decent housing standard depends very much on the large-scale voluntary transfer programme, which has now slipped well below the target of 200,000 houses a year? What action are the Government taking to ensure that the programme continues, so that we can be assured in this Parliament that we will complete the improvement within the 10-year time scale?

Keith Hill: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is absolutely right that, in order to meet the decent homes target, a good measure of property transfer will be required. It is worth bearing it in mind that we have a spending programme for housing of £22 billion over the next few years. A number of local authorities believe that they will be able to deliver the decent homes target by using existing funding streams. Elsewhere, the programme of private finance initiative stock transfers and arm's length management organisations will be required. We are working very closely with local authorities and registered social landlords to secure that objective, which we believe we will attain.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is the Minister aware that a number of developments in my constituency that originally received a lot of local support have now become highly controversial on account of the relevant planning policy guidelines? In one case, density has been increased from roughly 60 to 150 houses. Surely, he should be trusting local planners and local people and not relying on blunt PPGs as an instrument.

Keith Hill: We expect to co-operate with local planners, but the fact is that, under the previous Government, substantial bites were made into the green belt. This Government are committed to preserving the green belt. Indeed, no fewer than 30,000 hectares of green belt have been restored over the past six years. We believe that the future is to build as extensively as possible on brownfield sites, which will require high-density building. However, what we say above all is that

we have to get away from the very poor quality of design that was so often implemented in the past under the previous Administration. We place the central requirement on decent design in high-density building.

Sustainable Communities

7. **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden): What steps he is taking to implement the Liveability agenda in the development of sustainable communities. [125865]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): Liveability, which is about the quality of our local environment—the streets, parks and open spaces—is at the heart of the sustainable communities plan that I announced to the House a short while ago. We have increased the budget from which local authorities fund improvements to the local environment by more than £1 billion for the next three years. In addition, we have set aside an extra £201 million specifically to help transform our parks and green spaces and to improve urban design and skills—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is a great deal of noise in the Chamber.

Siobhain McDonagh: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Will he ensure that local authorities have the right powers to tackle the problems of graffiti, which blight the lives of people in my constituency and constituencies throughout the country?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The House is well aware of the campaign that my hon. Friend conducted for removing cars abandoned on the streets. We introduced powers to assist with the purposes of that campaign, which has helped every constituency. I am well aware of the survey that she recently conducted on tackling antisocial behaviour, which showed that crime had fallen by 27 per cent. in her constituency. We are looking closely at the other matters on which she is campaigning. If she is as successful as she was in getting the Government to introduce powers in respect of abandoned cars, her efforts will help to make improvements and to tackle graffiti and other problems of antisocial behaviour in her constituency.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): In Altrincham and Sale, we do not have sufficient secondary school places for the number of families seeking places—yet flat building and infill development are progressing apace. The local authority says that planning guidance does not let it stop that building, as it cannot take into account the absence of school places. When will the Government take that into account and revise planning guidance accordingly?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, there is a great deal of discussion about the planning changes that are necessary to deal with some of the current deficiencies. Indeed, some of those changes feature in legislation that is currently before the House. As for investment in education, we are putting a considerable amount into education—*[Interruption.]* Well, I think that we have 25,000 more teachers, plus 80,000 helpers. Criticism from an Opposition who, when they were in government, slashed teacher numbers and the quality of education, is a bit too much to accept.

Council Tax

8. **Mr. Paul Burstow** (Sutton and Cheam): What estimate he has made of the cost to local authorities of administration of *(a)* council tax and *(b)* council tax benefit in 2002–03. [125866]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Phil Hope): In 2002–03, council tax benefit administration costs in England totalled £205 million. Council tax collection costs totalled £318 million and have been decreasing in both absolute and real terms since council tax was introduced.

Mr. Burstow: I thank the Minister for that answer. Given the huge increase in council tax in the current year and the costs of collection and administration that he describes, will the Department's balance of funding review consider not only the balance of funding, but the abolition of the council tax and its replacement with a fairer form of taxation such as local income tax?

Phil Hope: As I said, council tax collection costs have gone down. We have all seen in the press the latest uncosted, ill-thought-through, back-of-a-fag-packet proposals of the Liberal Democrats, with a local income tax of 3p in the pound and a huge bureaucracy dumped on local government. We have devolved powers to Scotland, Wales, London and the English regions, and we have given a fairer deal to the council tax payer.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked

Engagements

Q1. [125874] **Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 16 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today.

Mr. Chope: Does the Prime Minister share my concern that two thirds of the British people do not trust the Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: I hope that what people do recognise is that a Government who have delivered the lowest inflation, lowest mortgage rates and lowest unemployment for decades, the best ever school results, and now record investment in the national health service, are a Government whom this country will be pleased to return at the next general election.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): My constituents support the tougher sentences for murderers and sex offenders in the Criminal Justice Bill. Given what has been going on in the other place, can the Prime Minister assure me that, unlike Conservative Members, he is committed to seeing that Bill through?

The Prime Minister: We are committed to seeing it through. The behaviour of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Opposition in opposing measures that will protect people in circumstances where there is an attempt to intimidate juries and where, as senior police officers are telling us, it is absolutely essential to deal with organised crime, is absolutely shameful.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee has said that it is "most unlikely" that Dr. Kelly was the prime source for the story about the Government's manipulation of intelligence, and that he has been "poorly treated by the Government". Will the Prime Minister now apologise?

The Prime Minister: The Foreign Affairs Committee has given its opinion as to the source. We have said to the Ministry of Defence that we do not know who the source is. The BBC, however, is a position to know who the source is, and can surely say whether this man is that source.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister is rapidly becoming a stranger to the truth. On 10 July, *The Times* carried a quote from No. 10 saying that it was "99 per cent. convinced" that the Gilligan source was David Kelly. So No. 10 did believe that it was David Kelly. A Labour member of the Committee says that the civil servant has been used as a fall guy by the Government. This has all the fingerprints of Alastair Campbell, who is using the machinery of Government to pursue a personal vendetta. How long is the Prime Minister going to let this continue; or was Alastair Campbell correct when he said, "Tony couldn't cope without me"?

The Prime Minister: The Ministry of Defence has made it clear that of course it does not know who the source is – only one body does, and that is the BBC. If there is some doubt about it, it is very simple for the BBC to clear it up. I should have thought that it is perfectly obvious that all the BBC needs to do is simply to say yes or no. It can do that, so why does it not?

Mr. Duncan Smith: We have had Formula 1, Mittal, Hinduja, Robinson, Mandelson and now the dodgy dossiers. Alastair Campbell and the Prime Minister have created a culture of deceit and spin at the heart of Government. When will the Prime Minister realise that until he sacks Campbell, no one will believe a word that he says any more?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman says that no one can believe us about Iraq, yet last year, he told us that he believed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction capability and that he fully supported action against Iraq. *[Interruption.]* The Conservatives are now apparently calling for a full-scale judicial inquiry into intelligence. Are they saying that they were duped and misled? The right hon. Gentleman supported action against Iraq. The Conservatives' current position is to claim that they were somehow misled over Iraq. The worst insult that I can level at them is that they are displaying opportunism worthy of the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole): Since 2,000 skilled manufacturing jobs in east Yorkshire depend on a Government decision to award a contract to British Aerospace for Hawk jets, will my right hon. Friend make an early announcement to secure those jobs and provide a first-class British product for our military?

The Prime Minister: We are in the course of making a decision on the matter. Of course, we want to do our best for the British defence industry, but that must be done on a cost-competitive basis. We are balancing those two factors and when we reach a decision, we shall announce it in the normal way.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Given that the Prime Minister previously told me that he stands by the accuracy of the assertions in the original September dossier on Iraq and weapons of mass destruction, how does he square the warning about the 45-minute imminence of an attack with Dr. Kelly's evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee yesterday? Dr. Kelly has worked for the United Nations Special Commission as well as the Ministry of Defence. He said that such a scenario was very unlikely. Which is the correct version?

The Prime Minister: It is also worth pointing out that Dr. Kelly made it clear that he believed that Iraq had a weapons of mass destruction capability. In the September dossier, we said that we had received such intelligence. That was cleared by the Joint Intelligence Committee. The allegation that the claim had been inserted into the dossier against the wishes of the security services by No. 10 Downing street was completely untrue. Since the right hon. Gentleman and Liberal Democrat Members have made that allegation, perhaps he will now say that he agrees that it is false.

Mr. Kennedy: Given the evidence that was offered to the Committee yesterday, was the 45-minute warning based in substance and fact or not? The Prime Minister makes one claim, the expert before the Committee makes another. Does not the continuing contradiction underline the need for the Prime Minister to announce before the summer recess the establishment of a time-limited independent inquiry, under a judge, to get to the bottom of the matter in order to restore public confidence once and for all?

The Prime Minister: As I understand it, the basis of the call for a public inquiry is that an issue arose in relation to 45 minutes because we had inserted false information into the dossier. *[Interruption.]* Now Liberal Democrat Members claim that they had no intention of making such a claim. I emphasise to the right hon. Gentleman that the intelligence in the September dossier was cleared by the Joint Intelligence Committee. The basis of the claim that the information was inserted into the dossier against the

advice of the security services—is untrue. The right hon. Gentleman now says that he is not making that claim; he could have fooled me.

Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley): Following Monday's publication of the second and third reports into the Harold Shipman inquiry, does my right hon. Friend agree with Dame Janet that the death certification process and the coroner system require urgent and radical change? When will the Government publish their response to her inquiry?

The Prime Minister: We shall of course look very carefully at the recommendations that have been made. It is also extremely important that we recognise that the Shipman case, although absolutely horrific, does not in any shape or form reflect on the work that GPs do in this country, because the vast majority of them do a wonderful job for our national health service. I agree entirely, however, that we must scrutinise the recommendations very carefully, particularly those relating to coroners' courts.

Q3. [125876] **Mrs. Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham): As the Prime Minister's country home is in Buckinghamshire, he will no doubt be familiar with the pride that we take in our selective school system, and with the great results that all our children get in all our schools. With the Education Secretary renewing his threats against our grammar schools, will the Prime Minister confirm that he will stand by his word and will neither change the existing ballot system nor introduce legislation to abolish our grammar schools?

The Prime Minister: I certainly stand by what has been said, and I would also like to point out to the hon. Lady that no grammar school has been closed under this Government. I hope she realises that the most important thing is surely to look at the school results not just of the small number of schools that are selective but of the vast majority that are not. I hope that she will also acknowledge that, under this Government, results in the non-selective schools in her constituency have gone up hugely for primary school students, at GCSE and at A-level.

Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): Is the Prime Minister aware of the document entitled "A Hard Day's Work Never Killed Anyone: Negligent Bosses Did", which was launched recently by the Transport and General Workers Union and which deals with the issue of corporate killing? What does the Prime Minister think about this document, and will he consider introducing a Bill in the next Parliament to deal with the issue of corporate killing?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, we have pledged to introduce legislation on this issue, although it is important to recognise that this is to do with corporate responsibility and that we do not believe that charges should be levelled against individual directors. This is an important issue, however, and we have made our position clear on it. I am not aware of the precise details of the TGWU document, but I shall read it now that my hon. Friend has drawn it to my attention.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): What should patients do if their local hospital has no stars under the Government's rating system?

The Prime Minister: I hope that they will carry on supporting the work being done in those hospitals to improve them and to make their care better, and that they will realise that it is only as a result of what this Government have done that they even know what the proper estimate of their hospital is.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Would it not be better for patients simply to ignore the ratings gimmick? As the new chairman of the British Medical Association says of the ratings,

"they measure little more than hospitals' ability to meet political targets."

Will the Prime Minister now confirm that, of the 20 hospitals with the worst rate of hospital-acquired infection, 13 of them today get the top rating for cleanliness?

The Prime Minister: The range of indicators that the Commission for Health Improvement takes into account covers all sorts of things, including hospital infections. I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman has now pledged that the Conservative party will abolish targets. There are targets relating to cleanliness, to waiting, to the treatment of breast cancer, and to in-patient and out-patient treatment, and I think that they are fully justified. On the right hon. Gentleman's particular point, the whole range of indicators is taken into account in these circumstances. That is why it is sensible that we provide the CHI with that information. The right hon. Gentleman is now saying that he would deny it to the commission.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The statistic that I have just mentioned shows categorically that this whole set-up is a gimmick. It tells us all that we need to know about this Government and the way in which they run the health service. As the audit commissioner said, we now have "quick fixes" to meet Government targets, rather than long-term reforms to serve patients better. With an NHS that puts bureaucrats and targets ahead of patients and doctors, is it any wonder than no one believes a word that this Prime Minister says any more?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman says that these things do not matter, let us just have a look at his own constituency to see what the national health service has been doing as a result of the extra investment there. There has been a 38 per cent. reduction in waiting lists for in-patients and a 73 per cent. reduction in out-patient waiters over 13 weeks. [*Interruption*.] He says that he does not believe that. Perhaps he will tell us whether he thinks it is true that, on 21 June this year, a

£2.5 million emergency medicine centre was opened at Whipps Cross hospital with 24 new medical assessment beds.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Nonsense.

The Prime Minister: Well, it is either there or it is not. I think that Conservative Members should go and have a look.

As for believing what I say, we can believe one thing said by the right hon. Gentleman's health spokesman, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). This is what he is on the record as saying:

"The first [phase] is to persuade the public the NHS is not working"

[Interruption.]

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot hear what the Prime Minister is saying.

The Prime Minister: I am about to explain why we are not going to follow this policy. Okay? This is the policy that the Government are not going to follow. We are not going to follow a policy that states

"We've got a problem in this country where the NHS and health care have been synonymous. We're here to break that."

We are not going to follow that policy. The hon. Member for Woodspring went on

"That means we get money, raise money from people through tax, certainly by health insurance, and even more so it means from self-pay."

We are not going to follow that policy either. We are going to carry on following the policies that we are following.

Q4. [125877] **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham): Community support officers are welcomed up and down the country because they make a large and visible contribution to local policing. In Wrexham, following the disturbances that we experienced last month, there is now a need for such policing. The local police and local people want community support officers immediately. Will the Prime Minister please have a quiet word with the Home Office, and ask it to implement this Labour policy as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: We will certainly take account of what my hon. Friend has said. As he probably knows, there are many community support officers working throughout the country. I consider their link to antisocial behaviour orders very important. With the Anti-social Behaviour Bill coming into effect, and given our ability to take more effective action against antisocial behaviour, I think that the cause of community support officers, and increasing them

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): How about more police?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. I almost forgot to mention this, but he has reminded me. Yes, as well as more community support officers there are now record numbers of police officers.

Q5. [125878] **Mr. Michael Weir** (Angus): Does the Prime Minister recall Harold Macmillan's famous dictum that no Prime Minister should be in conflict with the Brigade of Guards, the Church or the National Union of Mineworkers? This Prime Minister is now in conflict with the United Nations arms inspectors, the BBC and the Central Intelligence Agency. Is it any wonder that people are now beginning to ask whether the real problem is a dodgy dossier or a dodgy Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman prepared that one pretty carefully.

The hon. Gentleman is perfectly entitled to have been against the war from the very beginning. There are Members who, for perfectly honourable reasons, take that position. Let me say this to the hon. Gentleman, however. When we reflect on Security Council resolution 1441, which expressed the unanimous UN view that weapons of mass destruction were a threat to the world, when we see Iraq getting a governing council on a broadly representative basis for the first time in decades, and when we know that – according to the UN, not the British Government – there are some 300,000 missing people and 80 mass graves, I happen to believe, still, that we did the right thing.

Q6. [125879] **Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): On 3 July, the Government finally admitted that they had not passed to the International Atomic Energy Agency the evidence on which the Prime Minister based his statement to the House that we know that Saddam has been trying to buy significant quantities of uranium from Africa. Is the Prime Minister not concerned that the failure of the source of that intelligence to pass it on to the IAEA for scrutiny constitutes a breach of article 10 of Security Council resolution 1441, and would he still use such words of absolute certainty today?

The Prime Minister: I stand by entirely the claim that was made last September. Let me make two points to my hon. Friend. First, as she knows, the intelligence on which we based that was not the so-called forged documents that have been put to the IAEA. The IAEA has accepted that it received no such forged documents from British intelligence: we had independent intelligence to that effect. Secondly, it may be worth pointing out to the House and to the public that it is not as if the link between Niger and Iraq was some invention of the CIA or Britain. We know that in the 1980s Iraq purchased more than 270 tonnes of uranium from Niger. Therefore, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility – let us at least put it like that – that Iraq went back to Niger again. That is why I stand by entirely the statement that was made in the September dossier.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Is it beyond the bounds of possibility that the Prime Minister will renege on his commitment to reduce the number of Scottish Members of Parliament at Westminster?

The Prime Minister: No, we made that commitment clear and we will of course carry it through

Q7. [125880] **Mr. Michael Jabez Foster** (Hastings and Rye): Some 3,000 pensioners—among the least well-off in my constituency—are £30 a week better off as a result of the minimum income guarantee, over and above what they would have received under the old income support from the Tories. Some 5,000 more will know that thrift pays when the pension credit comes in later this year. What will my right hon. Friend do to ensure that people do claim those benefits?

The Prime Minister: There are already more than 1 million pensioner households on the new system, and of course we must ensure that the information gets to pensioners. In addition to all the other help that we are giving to the poorest pensioners—additional help with television licences for the over-75s, for example, the winter fuel allowance and so on—hundreds of thousands of people up and down the country will benefit from the new pension credit. That is why we remain committed to introducing it and will not do what the Conservatives would do—withdraw it and abolish it.

Q8. [125881] **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): The Prime Minister now rests his case for war on Iraq on the successful removal of Saddam Hussein's evil regime. I supported the war and I applaud that success. Before the war, the Prime Minister explicitly ruled out regime change as a reason for war. Indeed, it was Iraq's weapons of mass destruction that were the casus belli. Can he now reassure the House that we and the people of this country were not duped, and that British soldiers were not sent to their deaths on a false premise?

The Prime Minister: I really am surprised that the hon. Gentleman and other Conservative Members now say that, because at the time—let us recall—they and their Front Benchers were urging me to take action on the issue of weapons of mass destruction, wholly outside the dossier and the evidence. I do not accept that people were misled at all. I stand entirely by what was in the dossier and, in case anyone should doubt that weapons of mass destruction were an issue that did not just preoccupy the British or American Governments, in resolution 1441 the whole of the UN Security Council—not just Britain and America—agreed that they were an issue. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman, like others, should wait for the Iraq survey group to complete its work and then we can judge this on the basis of evidence, not speculation.

Q9. [125882] **Andy King** (Rugby and Kenilworth): My right hon. Friend is right to point out the significant progress that has been made in addressing poverty in the United Kingdom, including the winter fuel payment, the pension credit and the child tax credit, among others. Colleagues in this House and in the other place have asked for a meeting with my right hon. Friend to consider the matter of research into the income level necessary for healthy living. Will he agree to meet with us in the very near future to discuss that matter?

The Prime Minister: Of course I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend and his colleagues. It is worth pointing out that it is not only the working families tax credit and other benefits and tax credits that are assisting people. We have had a record increase in child benefit—up 25 per cent.—and for those on the disability income guarantee, we are helping some 133,000 of the poorest severely disabled people through the enhanced disability premium. This is all part of our attempt to make sure that we lift more people out of poverty. Already, since 1997, about half a million fewer children are in low-income households.

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): In 1998— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House must allow the hon. Gentleman to be heard.

Mr. Marsden: The Prime Minister and I have had a few differences over the years, but he was right to say, in 1998, that the level of homelessness was a source of shame. However, since 1997, the number of homeless families in priority need has risen from 102,000 to 125,000. Has he not failed some of the most vulnerable people in our society?

The Prime Minister: It is correct to say that homelessness remains a serious problem, but I would point out that the other side of the story is that we also gave commitments to cut the numbers of rough sleepers. We have achieved those commitments successfully.

Q10. [125883] **Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister join me and, I hope, all Staffordshire Members on both sides of the House, in congratulating our local police on securing the biggest reduction in crime of any force in England and Wales over the past year? However, does he accept that people in our constituencies and communities want to see more police on the beat so that they can feel safe? Therefore, will he say what steps are the Government taking to cut crime and antisocial behaviour even more than they have cut them already?

The Prime Minister: First, I congratulate the Staffordshire police on their achievement in reducing crime in my hon. Friend's constituency. Whereas crime doubled when the Conservatives were in office, the British crime survey estimates show that crime has fallen by about 25 per cent. under this Government. However, the most important thing that we can do is not just to increase the number of police officers—which we are doing—but to introduce measures on criminal justice and antisocial behaviour. The Liberal Democrats oppose the antisocial behaviour measures. The Conservative party, as I said earlier, is resisting measures that will help to convict some of the worst organised criminals in this country. We cannot deal with crime unless we deal with organised crime as well.

Q11. [125884] **Angela Watkinson** (Upminster): Does the Prime Minister agree with his chief inspector of schools that the exam system should undergo major reform? Or does he agree with the head teachers in my constituency, who want stability for their students and not more disruption and uncertainty?

The Prime Minister: I certainly understand why the hon. Lady's head teachers, and others, say that they want stability. The Tomlinson report is a long-term look at what is happening in our exam system. Most people would like us to investigate that, to make sure that our exam system for 14 to 19-year-olds is up to the standard of other countries. Therefore, I do not think that it is wrong to have the report, and we will study its impact very carefully. However, I hope that the hon. Lady will agree that one of the things that her head teachers will welcome, despite the recent difficulties, is the record investment in our school system.

Q12. [125885] **John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington): Last year, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry informed the House that the review of the transport arrangements for Royal Mail would increase the volume of mail delivered by rail. However, this month Royal Mail announced that it is to withdraw its rail operation in its entirety. That flies in the face of the Government's integrated transport policy and environmental policy. The basis of the decision has become increasingly open to scrutiny. The Government are the only shareholder in Royal Mail, so will my right hon. Friend undertake a swift review of the decision? Will he meet a cross-party delegation of MPs interested in the matter? The delegation will include representatives of the work force that is affected, which is facing a potential loss of 500 jobs.

The Prime Minister: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns, and I should be very happy to meet him and a delegation who will express those concerns in detail to me. The only thing that I hope that my hon. Friend realises is that the Government have to be very careful about interfering, and compelling a company—even one in which we are the shareholder—to do things that the company believes are not in its commercial interest. A careful balance has to be maintained in that respect.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Why is the Prime Minister so poorly briefed? When he told the House this morning about the effect of his colleagues in the Lords—many of them Labour—taking out clauses in the Criminal Justice Bill he said that that would lead to a problem with jury nobbling, and that defendants would not be able to have a trial by judge alone where jury nobbling had taken place. In fact, it was made clear in yesterday's Lords debate that that was one area about which there was complete unanimity that there should be legislation. In those circumstances, who writes the Prime Minister's dossier? Is it Mr. Campbell? Is that why the right hon. Gentleman spouts this rubbish?

The Prime Minister: I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman says that. As I understand it, the House of Lords is opposed to two elements. One relates to complex fraud trials, and is something that has been recommended over many, many years; otherwise, some of the worst criminals in the country get out of criminal charges. The second relates to intimidation. It is precisely in circumstances where the prosecution applies to the judge, saying that it believes that there is a risk of intimidation, that the judge has the power. That is the measure being opposed by the Conservative party and others, and they should cease their opposition to it.

Q13. [125886] **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): I recently met a constituent, Mrs. Yvonne Weir, whose son Mark was tragically killed by a drunken driver who fled the scene. The driver was well over the limit and had previous convictions for drink-driving. He was jailed, but he could be out and free within two years. Mrs. Weir feels that the justice system has very much let her down. What will the Government do to make sure that people who drink and drive and kill are properly punished?

The Prime Minister: First, I offer my condolences and, I am sure, those of the whole House to the family of my hon. Friend's constituent. This is a huge issue for many, many people and we are looking at whether stronger penalties, involving further use of re-testing, should be applied. Although it is true that deaths attributed to drink-driving have fallen by nearly 50 per cent. in the last decade, alcohol is still a factor in about one in eight of all fatal crashes in this country, so I think that there is a case for looking at the issue again. Along with the other measures to strengthen penalties in the criminal justice system, this is one of the issues that we will look at.

BILL PRESENTED

MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Mr. Edward O'Hara, supported by Tom Cox, Mr. Andrew Dismore, Mrs. Jackie Lawrence, Andy Burnham, Mr. Richard Allan and Mr. Kevin McNamara presented a Bill to provide for the trustees or board of certain museums and galleries and the Secretary of State to reach agreements relating to the return of objects or human remains, to the exchange of cultural objects or to international cultural co-operation; to enable the Secretary of State to make proposals for agreements and to issue directions in respect of agreements reached by him; to make provision arising from cases in which parties to an agreement in a country other than the United Kingdom are held not to have complied with the terms of an agreement; to provide for relevant museums and galleries to dispose of objects or human remains in their collections in pursuance of agreements or directions; to exempt exports of objects in pursuance of an agreement from cultural export controls; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 14 November, and to be printed [Bill 151].

UK Elections (Observers)

12.32 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for the appointment of observers at statutory elections and referendums in the United Kingdom; to make provision in respect of the observers; and for connected purposes.

Every year, a number of hon. Members and many civil servants travel to different countries to observe elections in those countries. They travel around visiting polling stations and they sit in on the count to make sure that everything is done as it should be and to make a report on that. However, that travel is all one way; there are no observers at UK elections. Our law currently lists who can attend a polling station and a count, and observers are not included in that list—yet.

In 1990, the UK agreed to the document published after the second conference on the human dimension of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe held in Copenhagen in that year. Paragraph 8 stated:

"The participating States consider that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process for States in which elections are taking place. They therefore invite observers from any other CSCE participating States and any appropriate private institutions and organizations who may wish to do so to observe the course of their national election proceedings, to the extent permitted by law. They will also endeavour to facilitate similar access for election proceedings held below the national level. Such observers will undertake not to interfere in the electoral proceedings."

The European Commission for Democracy through Law, known as the Venice Commission, a body of the Council of Europe, adopted an election evaluation guide at its meeting on 5 June 2003, which made the following statement about election observance or monitoring:

"The monitoring bodies play an essential role in the conduct of the poll, particularly in safeguarding the poll's pluralism, equality and legality."

So, we send people to observe elections in other countries, international bodies to which we have signed up support the observation of elections—in fact, they positively encourage election observation—but United Kingdom law does not allow someone into polling stations or the count to observe those elections. My Bill would change that. Why? The answer is in the statement from the Venice Commission, which says that election observation is a safeguard of an election's pluralism, equality and legality.

Traditionally, it has been thought that election monitoring is something that has to be carried out in countries that are newer to elections to ensure that they "do it right". Yes, we have been having elections for some time in this country. Yes, we have experience, but that does not mean that we cannot learn from having separate eyes look upon what we do.

When we vote, we are not asked for any identification. We can just present to the staff at the polling station and receive a ballot paper. It is not even necessary to have a polling card—someone can say a name and address and, as long as that name is registered on the electoral register at that address, the person can vote. In many countries, that would not happen. For example, no one in Armenia, which has recently had presidential and parliamentary elections, can vote without presenting their passport as proof of identity.

[Jane Griffiths]

I am not saying that we have a problem in this area. Only one constituent has ever contacted me because they turned up to vote and someone had already voted as them. However, it was only when I had the opportunity to observe the election in Armenia, where proof of identity is required before one can be issued with a ballot paper, that I thought about security and how that has an impact on the issuing of ballot papers.

Another reason to introduce the measures in this Bill is that if we observe other people's elections why should they not be able to see ours? When I was in Armenia visiting a polling station, someone asked me why I should be allowed to enter when he would not be allowed to enter a polling station in the UK. He had a point. I know that that is something that may well have been embarrassing to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the past.

The Electoral Commission reported on the 2001 general election. It said that the commission was contacted by a number of foreign delegations during the election campaign asking to observe the UK general election. Many more requests went direct to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and others involved in the administration of elections. In all cases, it was necessary to explain that there are strict legal regulations governing who can attend a polling station. So, if any right hon. or hon. Members were minded to be against this proposal because they perceived a lack of demand, I hope that I have shown that there is a demand for people to observe our elections.

As part of its report, the Electoral Commission decided that there should be an investigation into the observation of UK elections. That has been carried out and the report was produced in April. It recommended that UK law should be changed to allow UK elections to be observed. It also recommended that staff of the Electoral Commission should be added to the list of people allowed access to a polling station, and that persons under 18 accompanying a registered elector should be allowed into a polling station.

That is what this Bill sets out to do. Put simply, I wish to amend the Representation of the People Act 1983 to add observers, staff of the Electoral Commission and persons under 18 accompanying a registered elector to the list of people allowed into polling stations. The Bill would also add observers and staff of the Electoral Commission to the list of people allowed to attend the counting of votes. In both cases, the permission of the returning officer would be necessary.

In compiling the report to which I referred, the Electoral Commission discussed the proposed changes that led to the second part of the Bill, which calls on the Secretary of State to issue regulations to establish a code that will govern the behaviour of election observers in polling stations and at the count. The Bill sets out that that should include who may apply to be an observer, how to apply to be an observer, a form of permission, extent of access, secrecy requirements, impartiality requirements, maintenance of order requirements, prohibition of interference in the electoral process, and finance.

The Bill does not limit the content of the code to those items alone, as I realise that more may be necessary. I have listed those items because I believe that that is the minimum necessary to make the observation of elections work. That goes back again to the report of the Electoral Commission, which identified those as issues that need to be addressed to make it workable for people to observe our elections in the UK.

Finally, an Italian philosopher, once quoted by Robert Kennedy, said:

> "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things."

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Jane Griffiths, Mr. Terry Davis, Kali Mountford, Tony Lloyd, Chris McCafferty, Keith Vaz, Geraldine Smith, Mr. David Atkinson, Mr. A. J. Beith and Mrs. Ann Cryer.

UK Elections (Observers)

Jane Griffiths accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for the appointment of observers at statutory elections and referendums in the United Kingdom; to make provision in respect of the observers; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 14 November, and to be printed [Bill 152].

Opposition Day

[14TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Iraq

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. I also inform the House that there is a 12-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

12.41 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I beg to move,

That this House welcomes the Ninth Report from the Foreign Affairs Committee on the Decision to go to war in Iraq, Session 2002–03, HC 813; but notes some reservations by Committee members that it not only had insufficient time but insufficient access to crucial documents to come to comprehensive and definitive conclusions on some of the issues; further notes the recent concerns raised over intelligence material; and calls on the Government to set up a judicial inquiry finally to establish the facts of the matter.

I start by congratulating the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, under the chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), on its report. The Committee certainly had to work fast in the full glare of publicity, without the necessary access to intelligence papers and personnel, and it concluded, at paragraph 170 of its report, that the refusal by Ministers to allow such access hampered it in its work. Nevertheless, it has produced a useful report, while recognising that important questions remain unanswered. Indeed, it continues to ask some of those questions in the hope—I sometimes think that it is perhaps a vain hope—that it may still get answers to them. The Committee has not shied away from criticism. Indeed, the minutes of the proceedings show that the criticism would have been even sharper if certain amendments had been passed. It has done the House a service, for which I am sure that we are all grateful.

On weapons of mass destruction, the Committee effectively concludes that, while the survey group carries out its work, the jury is still out, and we all need to have regard to that position. It calls for further information on the so-called 45-minutes claim and on Iraqi attempts to procure uranium from Niger; and it famously concludes that, by referring to the dodgy dossier as "further intelligence", the Prime Minister misrepresented its status. I am pleased to see that the Committee also criticised Alastair Campbell's chairing of a meeting on an intelligence matter.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): A month ago, I wrote to the Prime Minister because of the answer that he gave me when I questioned him about the provenance of the dodgy document on the Floor of the House in February. Is my right hon. Friend surprised that, although the Foreign Secretary has apologised for the document, those of us who have questioned the Prime Minister on the Floor of the House have yet to see his own ministerial code implemented and to receive an appropriate apology, correcting the record?

Mr. Ancram: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and it is not for want of our asking for an apology that the Prime Minister has failed to give one. It is yet another indication of the Prime Minister's arrogance and his contempt not only for the House, but for his own rules in relation to his Ministers that he has not seen fit to come to the House to apologise. The Committee did not and could not, however, give the Government, the Prime Minister or Mr. Alastair Campbell a totally clean bill of health, hence our motion today.

We stand by our support for the action that was taken in Iraq. Like the Committee, we have no doubt, to quote paragraph 41 of the report, that

"the threat posed to UK forces was perceived as a real and present danger".

We believe that the development of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of Saddam Hussein and his refusal to comply with 18 UN Security Council resolutions justified action. That is why we supported the Government in the vote in the House on 18 March. Let me make it clear: we did not sustain the Government in office that night for fun or out of a sense of friendship. We did so because we believed that the threat to our national interest was real and that the Prime Minister was acting in the national interest.

That, however, is not the main issue of today's debate, which is about the way that the Government handled information in the run-up to that vote. The existence of weapons of mass destruction was not the sole justification for action, but they were certainly a part of it. The Prime Minister conceded that before the Liaison Committee on 8 July when he said:

"I accept entirely the legal basis for action was through weapons of mass destruction."

That brings me to the central purpose of today's debate. The Foreign Secretary rightly stated yesterday that the ability of the House to vote for or against war was a constitutional change. Not only was it a change but it carries grave responsibilities, which none of us on the night of the vote took lightly. Decisions of life and death can and must be taken only on the best information available. In the case of Iraq and Saddam Hussein, much of that information was bound to be intelligence-based and intelligence-provided. The House has no direct access to such intelligence but only what it is told by Ministers. The House must therefore be able to have total confidence not only in the intelligence information vouchsafed to it by the Prime Minister and his colleagues but in knowing what is intelligence-sourced and what is not. If that confidence is lacking or has been breached, the House cannot be responsibly asked to take on such grave matters.

The Prime Minister and the Government have an overriding duty to be scrupulous and consistent in the way that they provide intelligence material to Parliament. Over these last months, that has clearly not been the case. Two key areas exist, which are inevitably linked but nevertheless distinct: first, the status of the evidence on weapons of mass destruction, and secondly, the way in which the Government have handled and made public intelligence material. At the moment, the theme that links those more than anything else is that of confusion and inconsistency. In this area in which clarity is essential and consistency is vital, we have all found ourselves enmeshed in an increasingly tangled web that has been totally of the Government's weaving.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Would my right hon. Friend consider this proposition:

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

the Government's difficulty really stems from the fact that they decided to go to war to support the American alliance? They knew that that explanation would never be acceptable to Labour Members, and consequently they had to place on weapons of mass destruction a weight that it would not bear, as that was the only kind of argument that they could put to their hon. Friends.

Mr. Ancram: I know that that is my right hon. and learned Friend's view, and as I said on an earlier occasion, I respect him for it. I cannot say that I agree. What I can say is that the Opposition supported the Government because we believed that it was in the national interest to do so and that the situation provided a threat, and a current threat, to our national interests.

Let me start with the matter of weapons of mass destruction. I accepted, and I believe that I was justified in accepting, the Prime Minister's assertions that such weapons existed, not just before the war but since. On 28 April, he said in his monthly press conference that he remained confident that weapons of mass destruction "will be found". I also listened when, in St. Petersburg on 31 May, he reiterated his belief in the existence of weapons of mass destruction and told us that he was waiting to publish a complete picture, including material that was "not yet public" and evidence that he was going to assemble and "present properly". If I may say so, we are still waiting for that evidence.

I took seriously the Secretary of State for Defence when, on 7 April, he told the House:

"we will find weapons of mass destruction."—[*Official Report*, 7 April 2003; Vol. 403, c. 29.]

On 13 April, on Radio 4, he said:

"I'm absolutely convinced that they are there."

The tune then began to change—subtly at first. The Prime Minister told the Liaison Committee that he had no doubt that

"those weapons of mass destruction programmes existed".

He said that he had

"absolutely no doubt that we will find evidence of weapons of mass destruction programmes, no doubt at all."

There was no doubt either about the introduction of the word "programmes". The Prime Minister's official spokesman qualified the use of the word when he said:

"we will find evidence not only of weapons of mass destruction programmes but concrete evidence of the product of those programmes as well".

So, we have talk of programmes and their products, the result of which is increasing confusion.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I questioned the Prime Minister in the Liaison Committee and raised the subtle change of language. My right hon. Friend is on to an absolutely vital point. Surely the reason why we went to war was that Saddam Hussein posed a direct military threat to the region and the west. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the House is fully aware of that point and respond to a further specific point? Why did the Government simply stop talking about the 45-minute threat after September? They did not talk about it in March, so they must have known then that the information was no longer reliable.

Mr. Ancram: If I may, I shall come on to the 45-minute claim a little later in my remarks. We must be cautious not to get caught up on that point because I think that that was the intention of Mr. Alastair Campbell. He raised it before the Foreign Affairs Committee because he hoped to divert attention from more serious matters.

On my hon. Friend's first point, I say again that we need clarity on the Government's position on weapons of mass destruction because it has varied over the past few weeks. We need to know their clear position today. For example, on 9 July, the BBC political editor, Andrew Marr, said that senior sources

"at the top of Whitehall"

had told him that the Government now accepted that they would not find the weapons. I do not know who those senior sources were, but I would be interested to hear from the Foreign Secretary, who met Mr. Andrew Marr that afternoon, whether, by any chance, he agreed with those senior sources. I offer him the opportunity to respond now, although he might be keeping his head down.

Immediately after that, the story began to change again. Downing street disowned the senior source only to be outdone by a senior Foreign Office adviser who was reported in *The Herald* on 11 July as saying:

"We remain confident that weapons of mass destruction and products will be found and nobody at the Foreign Office takes the view that we no longer believe we will find them".

The situation is completely circular. There are those who say that the weapons will not be found and those who say that they will be found. Some people make attributable comments and some make non-attributable comments. Once again, we have confusion. The only thing that remains clear about the Government's position on weapons of mass destruction is that it is totally confused. We need today an unambiguous statement from the Foreign Secretary on where the Government stand on weapons of mass destruction.

That is only part of the tangled web in which the Government are foundering. The other part is how they have handled intelligence material. For example, there was a claim about uranium from Niger going to Iraq. The claim was stated as a fact in the September dossier but was subsequently shown to have been partially based on forged documents. There was no explanation of who forged them and why. There is no mention of CIA concerns in the Government's response. We now have a belated explanation that there were other sources of intelligence that apparently cannot be disclosed. Even more unusually, we are told that such sources cannot be shared with the United States. There are again more unanswered questions, and further confusion and suspicion.

I have never thought that the 45-minutes claim was key. I believe that Alastair Campbell decided to make that the smokescreen behind which to conceal the Government's other shortcomings. He believed that war with the BBC was preferable to war with Labour Back Benchers. The smoke has blown back in his face. In the farcical charade of who non-attributably told whom what and when on the provenance of the 45-minute claim, the Government last week suddenly offered up their official, Dr. David Kelly. Yesterday, Dr. Kelly made it clear, contrary to what the Government had suggested, that he was not Mr. Andrew Gilligan's

unnamed source, and I understand that the Foreign Affairs Committee has supported him. There has been more inaccurate spin and confusion.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Has my right hon. Friend given any thought to why, when Mr. Andrew Gilligan first made his accusations on the media, which was some weeks before the Foreign Affairs Committee investigated the matter, 10 Downing street and Mr. Alastair Campbell did not complain immediately? Instead, Mr. Campbell seemed to wait until he appeared before the Committee. Surely that is another example of the way in which the Government set up smokescreens.

Mr. Ancram: That is precisely why I thought that there was a smokescreen. There had been no earlier complaint about the report on the "Today" programme and no complaint was made about a report on "Newsnight", which was produced independently of the investigation that gave rise to the story on the "Today" programme. The Government have never complained about the "Newsnight" report although it made precisely the same allegations as Mr. Gilligan.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Is the right hon. Gentleman not aware that Downing street and Alastair Campbell refuted the story on the morning of 29 May? Downing street issued a denial within an hour of the broadcast of the report on the radio.

Mr. Ancram: I am still puzzled about why Downing street did not issue a denial after the "Newsnight" report. The report contained exactly the same allegations, although they were made by a different journalist. I have been in politics for a long time and when I see a cloud of smoke going up, I reckon that I can tell whether it is a smokescreen or an explosion.

The most damaging element of the whole affair relates to the so-called dodgy dossier that was published on 3 February 2003. As we know, it was largely composed of a relatively old PhD thesis that had been published on the internet and, to use the jargon, cut and pasted. That made it dodgy but not necessarily wrong. What was wrong was that the Prime Minister told Parliament that it was "further intelligence" when it was not. What was wrong was that the dossier was not a product of the intelligence services but of a committee chaired by Alastair Campbell. What was wrong was that it was taken for what it was not. The Foreign Affairs Committee rightly reported:

"By producing such a document the Government undermined the credibility of their case for war".

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): The right hon. Gentleman cited the Prime Minister's statement about "further intelligence". However, does he accept, as the Foreign Affairs Committee makes clear, that the Prime Minister did not set out to mislead Parliament and that he acted inadvertently? The right hon. Gentleman goes on about how awful smokescreens are, but he slips in facts and tries to move away from them, thus creating smokescreens of his own. Will he accept that the Prime Minister's actions were not deliberate?

Mr. Ancram: I shall address that point directly in a few moments because it is important.

The Government's production of the document was not the only thing that undermined the credibility of their case for war. We now know that the Prime Minister, albeit inadvertently, misled Parliament, for which he has neither apologised nor explained himself. When challenged, he said that he did not know the document's full provenance. He said that he did not know that it was not an intelligence document when he spoke about it in the House. Apparently, the Foreign Secretary did not know that either because he said the other day that he did not know that the document was not an intelligence document for more than three days, although his Department is the sponsoring Ministry for MI6. So it is all right as long as one does not know.

It is all right, perhaps, for those of us who have no reason to know, but the people who did not know are not ordinary people or Back Benchers—they are the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. Are we really to believe that they did not know? It beggars belief. They run the Government. They are supposed to be running the country. Why did they not know? Why were they not told by Alastair Campbell? In any event, what on earth was he doing chairing an intelligence assessment committee? The arch-manipulator of the truth was in charge of assessing the truth of intelligence. There is an irony in that. We can only assume that Mr. Campbell was operating on a need-to-know basis and that, in his view, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary did not need to know.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Is it not even more mysterious that in Prime Minister's questions last week, when the Prime Minister knew that the overwhelming part of the dossier was not intelligence based, he still asserted:

"I am afraid that I do not accept that Parliament was misled in any way at all." [*Official Report*, 9 July 2003; Vol. 408, c. 1151.]?

He tried to embroil the Leader of the Opposition in his argument by asking him if any of the intelligence in that dossier was untrue. But that was not the misleading; the misleading lay in the presentation of a dossier to Parliament as if it were primarily intelligence-based when it was primarily not intelligence-based. So the Prime Minister, in denying that Parliament was misled previously, was actually misleading Parliament deliberately on that later occasion.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must withdraw that remark. "Deliberately" and "misleading" are not what I expect to hear from him.

Dr. Lewis: At your request, Mr. Speaker, I, of course, withdraw the remark. I only wish I could think of another way of making the same point that would be acceptable to you.

Mr. Ancram: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I have listened to the Prime Minister and I think that he believes that an inadvertent misrepresentation of status to the House of Commons is not misleading. I am not accusing him of deliberately misleading, but if one says something that is wrong and people believe it, one has misled. I am prepared to accept, as I said, that he did not know that he was misleading. My charge against him is why on earth did he not know? If he were doing his job properly, he would have known. If this were fiction, our review of the book would be that it was unbelievable.

Some will ask whether the dodgy dossier really matters. The fact that the Prime Minister misrepresented its provenance goes to the heart of the trust that Parliament can put in what he tells it is, or is not, intelligence. His failure to acknowledge that leaves an enormous question mark hanging over anything that he in future tells the House is, or is not, intelligence. He has squandered his trustworthiness and is doing little to retrieve it.

The erosion of public confidence is gathering pace and beginning to damage the national interest. Opposition Members do not believe that the issue should be allowed to drift on into the autumn. If Labour Members think that the coming recess is a beach to a drowning man, they will find when they get there that the beach is a mirage.

There is an urgent unanswerable case for the Government to set up an independent judicial inquiry into what is now a matter of urgent public importance. It could be asked to report within six months, require the attendance of witnesses who could be examined on oath and compel the production of documents. It could get to the bottom of this murky pool, establish the truth and re-establish public confidence.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The right hon. Gentleman says that the matter should not be allowed to drag on into the autumn. I remind him that the Scott inquiry took 18 months. I can imagine the shouts of horror if an artificial timetable of six months were imposed on a judge who would say that he could not complete it within that time.

Mr. Ancram: If the Government acknowledge the public concern and set up a judicial inquiry to reassure them, they could bring the discussion to an end. It may be against my party political interests to do that, but at least it would be in the national interest.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does my right hon. Friend think that any such inquiry would seriously undermine what the Prime Minister told the House on 18 March?

Mr. Ancram: I hope that it would not. We backed the Prime Minister on 18 March because we believed that he was acting in the national interest. We need to get to the truth of the matter, rather than the half-statements and half-truths that we have heard so often in response to recent allegations. By doing that, we will restore confidence in the Prime Minister's ability to talk about intelligence matters to the House of Commons and restore confidence in intelligence itself. Both of those have been damaged by what has gone on.

Mr. McLoughlin: If the Government complain about six months for an inquiry, may I remind my right hon. Friend of what Mr. Michael Foot said about setting up an inquiry? He stated:

"If there is any difference in emphasis between me and the right hon. Lady about the way in which"

the matter should be presented to the House

"it is on timing. I do not believe that the inquiry need take six months. I believe that"

it could complete its work

"considerably more speedily". [*Official Report*, 8 July 1982; Vol. 27, c. 477.]

That inquiry also had two former Labour Cabinet Ministers on it.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information. I was not aware of it and he makes a useful point.

The real problem is that the matter is a mess. It is a mess of the Government's own making. Through incomplete information, unattributable briefings, half-truths and pathetic smokescreens, they have brought about a failure of confidence, a collapse of trust in the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Government, and a serious undermining of public confidence in British intelligence.

I will not lose sleep over the loss of trust in the Prime Minister and his Government. In my book, that was never high, but failure of confidence in intelligence is serious. Lack of trust when the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary bring intelligence material to the House is serious, too. The situation cannot be allowed to drift. An independent judicial inquiry should be set up now. That would be the right thing for the Government to do. It is the responsible thing for the Government to do. It is in the public interest. I commend the motion to the House.

1.7 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the Ninth Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee on the Decision to go to War in Iraq, Session 2002–03, HC 813; notes that substantial oral and written evidence, by and on behalf of the Government, was provided to the Committee; believes that the Intelligence and Security Committee, established by Parliament by statute, is the appropriate body to consider the intelligence relating to Iraq; and notes that this Committee has already begun its inquiry."

The Opposition's motion raises two central questions: whether an independent judicial inquiry in respect of intelligence relating to Iraq would be the most appropriate form of inquiry; or whether the membership, powers and practices of the Intelligence and Security Committee are sufficient to give this House and the general public an objective and informed picture of the role of intelligence in the run-up to military action.

The demand for a judicial inquiry stems from accusations that the Government may have misrepresented or exaggerated intelligence. I think that that was the point that the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) made, although it was not always clear. Let me reiterate that the Government stand by the judgments reached in the dossier published on 24 September and, in respect of the accuracy, of the contents of the briefing paper that we issued on 3 February this year.

We welcomed the Foreign Affairs Committee's decision on 3 June to conduct the inquiry. I note that the Opposition also welcome it in the motion, but another element of the motion is frankly disingenuous—namely, the implication that the Foreign Affairs Committee had to pursue its investigation within time constraints dictated by the Government. It is not the place of any Government to seek to influence the time scale of any Select Committee inquiry, nor did we do so. The deadline of 7 July for the publication of the Committee's report was determined by the Committee alone. Moreover, as everyone knows, it continues to take evidence and has sought further material from me in the past two days. As the Committee records, it took evidence from a number of sources. I spent more than five hours before the Committee, including a private session where I disclosed sensitive details relating to the Government's intelligence on Iraq. On each occasion, senior officials from my Department joined me, including the permanent secretary, Sir Michael Jay, and the political director, Peter Ricketts. My office sent the Committee substantial written evidence, including, on 19 June, a comprehensive memorandum setting out the main political and diplomatic developments in the months preceding military action.

We will of course respond in writing to the FAC's report and recommendations within the standard two-month period, as well as meeting much earlier deadlines set by the FAC for further and better information. However, I hope that some of the FAC's conclusions will lend perspective to today's debate. Although Committee members split 6 4 on the last part of recommendation 14, repeated in paragraph 86, that

"allegations of politically inspired meddling cannot credibly be established",

they were unanimous in their central conclusions that although they had concerns about the emphasis given to some of the intelligence, the claims made in the September dossier

"were in all probability well founded on the basis of the intelligence then available".

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): It is not quite clear to me whether the Foreign Secretary accepts that the Foreign Affairs Committee had insufficient access to crucial documents to come to comprehensive and definitive conclusions. Will the Foreign Secretary answer that?

Mr. Straw: I have said on the record that in our judgment the FAC is not the appropriate body to see all the intelligence. That job, the House and Parliament have decided, is for the Intelligence and Security Committee. That is a matter of fact, and I do not want get involved in another matter of fact—the gentle tussle between the FAC and the ISC. However, I would tell the hon. and learned Gentleman I am happy to be corrected, but I think that this is true—that I have gone further in seeking to provide evidence directly from intelligence than most Ministers have gone in the past. I shall continue to do so, and I regard it as my duty to be responsible to the House and its Select Committees—as I am—as well as to the Intelligence and Security Committee.

I shall now deal with the key issue of a judicial inquiry raised by the right hon. Member for Devizes. The original motion tabled in the middle of June by the Leader of the Opposition called for a judicial inquiry under the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921. An inquiry under the 1921 Act is established to investigate a

"definite matter . . . of urgent importance."

Given the wide judicial powers of any such inquiry, a key feature is the protection afforded to witnesses, now in accordance with the so-called Salmon procedures. Those procedures, introduced to

"minimise the risk of injustice to individuals",

mean that all persons called before an inquiry held under the 1921 Act are entitled to legal protection. Of course that is admirable, but it means that inquiries can be frustrating for the public because of the duration and the costs involved. The Salmon procedures are not confined to inquiries formally established under the 1921 Act, and apply to any other judicial inquiry. The Scott inquiry was not formally a 1921 Act inquiry—one of the demands by my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), with the full support of the Opposition, was that it should be a 1921 Act inquiry—but even though it was not, in practice, as the report makes clear, it had to take full account of the rules of evidence, provide for legal representation and follow the Salmon procedures.

The motion tabled by the Leader of the Opposition in June called for an inquiry to be completed in six months. The right hon. Member for Devizes referred to that today, but I have to tell the House and him—and he should know this—that if a senior member of the judiciary is asked to conduct an independent inquiry, he will exercise independence on timing as much as on content. If he is not allowed sufficient time, justice cannot be done or be seen to be done. I should like to correct a point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), who underestimated the time taken by the Scott inquiry. That inquiry was established in 16 November 1992 and did not report until February 1996. A similar time scale would take any inquiry in this Parliament beyond the final date for a general election, and that is in no one's interest.

Moreover, it is quite wrong to assume that independent judicial inquiries, whether established under the 1921 Act or not, automatically bring the issues to a close. Sometimes they do not, and I ask the House to take full note of that. In 1972, an independent judicial inquiry into Bloody Sunday was set up under the 1921 Act by the then Prime Minister Edward Heath, under a most distinguished senior member of the judiciary at the time, Lord Chief Justice Widgery. However, his report did not close the issue to the satisfaction of all the parties. There was continuing criticism of his independence and judiciousness, notwithstanding his distinguished reputation, which led many years later to

[Mr. Straw]

the establishment of the latest independent judicial inquiry into Bloody Sunday, the length of which has far exceeded the length of the Scott inquiry. It is now in its fifth year and has cost £100 million.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that setting up that inquiry was as profound a mistake as the setting up of any inquiry into the decision to go to war in Iraq would be?

Mr. Straw: My lips are sealed on the setting up of the first one. However, as I said, it is now in its fifth year, and some people who were evangelical in their support for it may now be questioning its utility.

Mr. McLoughlin: If the Foreign Secretary is to have credibility, can he explain to the House why, when the Government were first elected, they were so keen to set up not just the Bloody Sunday inquiry but a number of inquiries into the actions of the previous Government, whereas they are now reluctant to have any inquiries into their own actions?

Mr. Straw: I was just about to come to that, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point.

I set up a judicial inquiry, chaired by Sir William Macpherson, into the events surrounding the death of Stephen Lawrence. I hoped—and this was the family's wish—that the previous Government would set up such an inquiry, and we urged them to do so for five years. There was no reason for them not to do so, as plainly they were not to blame for what happened in Eltham that terrible April day. However, they failed to do so. When I made my decision, I was rightly supported by the then shadow Home Secretary and the House as a whole. I am grateful to the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) for prompting me, because if he looks at the 24 1921 Act inquiries carried out over the past 82 years, he will see that almost all of them have involved serious allegations of misconduct flowing from, or leading to, criminal investigations. Before it comes to conclusions about the utility of the Opposition's motion, the House needs to weigh up the fact that those inquiries have on average taken two years to publish their findings.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): May I chide the Foreign Secretary a little for referring to evangelical requests? There may have been evangelistic pressure, but if it was evangelical it would be seeking truth. Instead, it was actually yielding to the terrorists who wanted to get at the British Army and security services in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Straw: I stand corrected by the hon. Gentleman about the difference between two words with a similar root.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Before the Foreign Secretary gets bogged down in the details of the inquiry, can he address the central objection to relying on two internal parliamentary Committees, whatever their merits? That objection concerns their independence. Every member of those two Committees took part in the vote on going to war—a new experience for us. They cannot therefore be judged to be independent when they are asked to make a judgment on their own decisions. That is the main reason why the country will not be satisfied—there must be a group of people outside the House who are free of accusations about making that original decision.

Mr. Straw: That is an ingenious argument, using something that was welcomed across the House—the introduction of substantive motions for the decision to go to war—against the position that I am recommending to the House. The answer is clear. If that is the case, every single Select Committee will be disabled in every single inquiry that it ever undertakes. Moreover, my hon. Friend may not know members of the judiciary as well as some of us do. To my certain knowledge, the idea that a wide range of members of the judiciary did not have clear opinions about the decision to go to war is nonsense. I spoke to many of them in the run-up to the war. It was a matter of great controversy and interest. Some were in favour, others were against; none was indifferent.

The usual argument about the control and scrutiny of the intelligence and security services has been that there ought to be stronger parliamentary scrutiny of them through the establishment of a Select Committee, rather than by the ISC. My hon. Friend seems to be arguing that we should not have confidence in our own ability to scrutinise the work of Ministers. Finally, if my hon. Friend looks at those who sit on the ISC—I shall deal with the ISC in more detail in a moment—he will see that the distinguished members of that body cover a fairly wide range of opinion on military action. I am clear that they are capable, as their record shows, of reaching decisions that are independent and judicious.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South) *rose*

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) *rose*

Mr. Straw: I must make progress. I apologise.

That brings me to my second question: whether the membership, powers and practice of the Intelligence and Security Committee are sufficient to give the House and the general public an objective and informed picture of the role of intelligence in the run-up to military action. My answer is yes. The ISC was established by the Intelligence Services Act 1994 after years of concern that Parliament was not able to play a proper role in holding to account the intelligence and security agencies or the Ministers responsible for them. One of the concerns that I recall was that where there were serious questions about the agencies and the use of intelligence, Government had to resort to establishing one-off inquiries—as they had to with Franks inquiry on the Falklands, and to a degree, although there were also allegations of criminality, in respect of the Scott inquiry on arms to Iraq—because there was no standing machinery to do this, as there is in countries such as the United States and in other parliamentary democracies.

The debate in 1994 shows that although there was some questioning about the composition and powers of the ISC, the whole House welcomed its establishment. There was no vote against it. Over the years, the ISC has

shown that any initial concerns about it have been unfounded. With members drawn from both Houses and all main parties, the ISC has performed its function with distinction. Its reports on the Mitrokhin archive and the terrorist atrocity in Bali are models of their kind, and proof that the ISC is perfectly capable of independence of judgment. Its reports have included important recommendations that have helped the agencies and their supervising Ministers and Departments to improve their performance, and they have included strong criticisms of the Government. If the ISC finds fault with our performance during their current investigation, I expect to hear such criticism again.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): The Foreign Secretary again uses the existence of the Intelligence and Security Committee, as he did in front of the Foreign Affairs Committee, as an excuse for not giving us access to documents and officials. Does he acknowledge that, when the ISC was set up, the then Foreign Secretary said that the existence of the Committee would not

"truncate in any way the existing responsibilities of existing committees"?

The right hon. Gentleman is now praying it in aid to do exactly that.

Mr. Straw: No—and nor has the ISC truncated those responsibilities. The point about the ISC was that it filled a vacuum. There was no Committee for Parliament to supervise the intelligence and security agencies. The hon. Gentleman knows that, although there is some overlap between the work of the agencies or their product and the role of the FAC, the FAC's role is in respect of my responsibilities for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, not in respect of my responsibilities for the intelligence and security agencies. Parliament could have chosen to decide otherwise. As the Committee acknowledges, I am open to the argument that there should be a special Select Committee, but the current arrangements are those that Parliament decided.

Donald Anderson: Surely the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) is correct. The Government are cutting across the work of an existing Select Committee by their decision. I refer my right hon. Friend to paragraph 169 of the report, in which the Committee states:

"We recommend that the Government accept the principle that it should be prepared to accede to requests from the Foreign Affairs Committee for access to intelligence, when the Committee can demonstrate that it is of key importance to a specific inquiry it is conducting and unless there are genuine concerns for national security."

Precisely so. It was a specific inquiry. The Government hampered our inquiry by not allowing us full access to the relevant intelligence.

Mr. Straw: My right hon. Friend will acknowledge that I provided a considerable degree of relevant intelligence. Moreover—this is a matter for the House, not for me—my right hon. Friend must acknowledge that there is an issue here of the boundaries of responsibilities of the FAC and the ISC. I am glad to see the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) acknowledge that. It is true. It is wrong for my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East and others to seek to embroil me or Ministers in what is essentially an issue for Parliament.

The crucial thing is that we are fully accountable in respect of foreign policy and the work of the agencies to those two bodies established by Parliament, one a Select Committee, the other established by statute. Furthermore, as I suggested to my right hon. Friend when I gave evidence, and as I believe is happening, there is a good case for the two Committees to work in co-operation—for example, as I know from my visit to the ISC yesterday, the FAC provided the ISC with the full transcript of the evidence that I gave in private to the FAC so that i could be further interrogated by that body.

The House may be wondering why no member of the ISC is present for this debate. The answer is that members of that Committee are in the middle of their inquiry, which they initiated on 8 May. The Prime Minister and I gave evidence to the Committee yesterday. Other Ministers and senior officials will also be cross-examined.

The Conservatives established the ISC, and when it has suited the right hon. Member for Devizes, he has been fulsome in his praise for the Committee and its work, as he was in the case of Bali and as he was just two weeks ago in the debate on the ISC's annual report on 3 July. So I find it astonishing that there is no mention of the work of that Committee, which was set up by the Government of which I think he was a member in 1994. Still less did he mention the ISC at any stage in his speech. That is astonishing, and the approach is insulting to all members of the Committee, including distinguished members from his own party—the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) and the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot). It is insulting, too, to Lord King, who chaired that Committee with distinction for many years and who was one of those who were able to build up its reputation and methods of operation.

Mr. McLoughlin *rose*

Mr. Straw: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

Having given evidence before the ISC as both Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary over the past six years, I can personally testify to the integrity and rigour that former and current members of the Committee bring to their work. I have no doubt that they will pursue their investigation into the use of intelligence in respect of Iraq with the same degree of probity and concern for the public interest as they displayed during the Bali inquiry. We can expect them to deliver their conclusions swiftly, and the public can be sure that they will have arrived at their judgments on the basis of key intelligence material.

Richard Ottaway: Does the Foreign Secretary think the Committee will look into the question of supplies of uranium from Africa? I tabled a question last week asking whether Iraq had sought the supply of uranium from Africa that had no civil nuclear application in Iraq. The right hon. Gentleman will recognise those words as being exactly the words in the September dossier.

[Richard Ottaway]

Judging by what the Prime Minister said at Question Time today, one would have thought that the answer would be yes, but instead, the Minister for Europe replied with some waffle about the civil nuclear programme being frozen and there being no civil application for the uranium sought. Why can we not have straight answers to such questions? The question was perfectly clear. It is obfuscation like that that requires committees to be set up to give the straight answers that we are after.

Mr. Straw: It was a straight answer. Moreover, the hon. Gentleman knows very well that I sent the Foreign Affairs Committee a two-page letter last Friday with further detail that was put on record on Friday evening, after he and his colleagues on the Committee had received it.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury) *rose*

Dr. Julian Lewis *rose*

Mr. Straw: I am sorry, but I am going to make progress.

The right hon. Member for Devizes spoke about this matter drifting on into the autumn. He wants a judicial inquiry, but if such an inquiry were established, it would not drift into the autumn, but be kicked into the long grass for the next couple of years. The right hon. Gentleman needs to be aware of that, as there is no way that a judicial inquiry could take six months and do a proper job.

The hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) raised in an intervention on the right hon. Member for Devizes an issue that has also been raised in the press—the question whether a Franks-type inquiry should be held, as in respect of the Falklands. There have been some suggestions in the press that the Franks inquiry was a judicial inquiry, but it was not. Lord Franks was a distinguished public servant, but never a judge. He had been a diplomat, a United Kingdom ambassador in the US and permanent secretary to the Ministry of Supply at the end of the war. He was a distinguished business man, head of an Oxford college and a member of the House of Lords. A judge, however, he was not.

Three other members of the Franks committee—I make this point since we have heard Franks prayed in aid outside the House as the answer—were Members of the House of Lords. I shall read out their names so that people can weigh the degree of judiciousness and independence that they brought to the job—as, of course, they did. Lord Barber was a former Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer; Lord Watkinson was a former Conservative transport Minister; and Lord Harold Lever, an entertaining friend of ours on the Labour Benches, was a former Paymaster General and Minister without Portfolio. The committee included one Member of this House, Merlyn Rees, the former Home Secretary, and Sir Patrick Nairn, a good man and a former permanent secretary of the Department of Health and Social Security, who had before his translation to that post spent the whole of his career in the Ministry of Defence. They were distinguished people, but no one can seriously claim that such a group was any more qualified or distinguished than the current ISC. I was in this House when the Franks committee was established.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I think that I am the only Member of the House of Commons to have been summoned by the Franks committee to give evidence. Frankly, however distinguished its members were, they were all round the shop in their questioning. Their questioning was absolutely loose, and I was not the only witness or judge who thought so. Franks was tired and too old to do the job, and it was a disaster.

Mr. Straw: And that is what the Opposition want.

Sir Patrick Cormack: What the distinguished Father of the House really means is that the Franks inquiry did not agree with him.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) was in good company at the time. Indeed, I have been reading the statements that were made in this House when Franks reported. My hon. Friend made an important point. If we are going to find a judge to do such work—I had to recognise that this was the case when I established entirely justified judicial inquiries into judicial matters—on the whole, we have to go for judges who are retired, as others will not be available for the indefinite period for which they will operate. Sometimes, they could be described as old and tired.

Frankly, when we are dealing with subjects that are so intrinsically political, the idea that simply because somebody has been adorned with a judge's wig, they will be devoid of political judgment or opinion, or that that will not seep through into what they say, is nonsense.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman and I need to make progress.

Let us be clear: if there had been an ISC, there would have been no need for Franks. Neither the nature of the committee's membership nor its modus operandii removed it from controversy. As well as the criticism laid at its door by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow, I remember, as I was in the House—I double-checked my memory earlier today—a wonderful put-down by my right hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), who said that Franks was

"an establishment cover-up and a whitewash".—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1983; Vol. 35, c. 180.]

Such inquiries often do not lay such intense political issues to rest, but merely keep them as running sores.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Has the Foreign Secretary not even been tempted to set up an independent judicial inquiry? Such an inquiry has its attractions. I think that it would be convenient to him, as he could say to the Liberals, the Tories and even to some Labour Members, "I am not

going to deal with these details, as they are being dealt with by a judicial inquiry." If such an inquiry were established, we would not have these debates and questions, and as he said, the report would not be published until after the general election. Surely, there is some temptation, as it is far more difficult for him to be constantly questioned and challenged by this House and by two Committees.

Mr. Straw: I am afraid that my right hon. Friend is possessed of even more guile than me. Of course, there is an important truth in what he says. The Opposition tabled a motion calling for a judicial inquiry under the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921 in the middle of June, and when the ISC arose in the debate about Iraq two weeks ago, the right hon. Member for Devizes did not mention the idea of a judicial inquiry. However, he now thinks that, if he avoids the name of the 1921 Act, he can avoid all the complications that go with it. That shows what a shambles and how useless the Opposition are.

Mr. Ancram: We were talking earlier about smokescreens, but the Foreign Secretary has now been speaking for half an hour and he has yet to get on to the merits of what the Select Committee looked at or indeed the allegations that I made. He has so far talked about nothing except the very last part of the motion. Unless he is going to speak for a very long time, he may be trying to avoid dealing with the issues that are of interest to the public. May I ask him one question: does he agree with Andrew Marr's senior sources at the top of Whitehall who said that the Government now accepted that they would not find weapons of mass destruction, or with *The Herald*'s senior Foreign Office adviser, who said:

"We remain confident that weapons of mass destruction and products will be found"?

If he answers only that question, we may at least make a little progress.

Mr. Straw: That also shows just how useless this Opposition are. Yesterday we had questions lasting an hour and a quarter in which I was interrogated and during which he could have asked me those questions. I do not know whether he has noticed it, but the reason why I am concentrating on whether there should be a judicial inquiry is that that is in the terms of the motion. It is my experience that, if one strays beyond the terms of the motion, one can be pulled up. The right hon. Gentleman is not asking me to pre-judge these issues, as I have already made our assertions and made clear our confidence about the judgments in the 24 September dossier and the contents of the document published on 3 February. He is seeking to avoid any involvement by the House in these judgments and to ensure that they are made instead by some independent judicial body.

At the heart of the argument is the question whether we should kick this matter into the long grass for two, three or four years, at a cost of some £20 million or £30 million, or allow Members of this House to hold the inquiry. That is the central issue before us today. I know that some Members of the House challenge the method of appointment and reporting of the ISC. That does not lie well in the mouth of the Opposition or the right hon. Member for Devizes; the Intelligence Services Act 1994 was their Act. To make such claims because the ISC is appointed by the Prime Minister and reports to the House through him is outrageously to traduce the Committee. The right hon. Gentleman should be ashamed of himself for not being able even to utter the words "Intelligence and Security Committee" when it was he and his Government who established it. It is representative and its members are not toadies.

The House knows that, because the ISC must have access to sensitive intelligence, there has to be a filter to ensure that the published contents of the report do not compromise national security. However, the 1994 Act spells out that any redactions have to be made clear; and there is no question of the Prime Minister or any Minister interfering with any of the Committee's conclusions, and neither would the Committee keep quiet if there were any attempt to do so.

Let me come to my last point on a judicial inquiry. Who would appoint that judicial inquiry? I have some news for the right hon. Member for Devizes. If it were outside the 1921 Act, I am sorry to have to tell him that I would have to make the appointments. If it were under the Act, by law the appointments would have to be made by the Prime Minister. The right hon. Gentleman should think about that.

The dossiers of September and February set out the case for dealing with Iraq rather than ignoring Iraq, not the case for military action. In September and in February, all our efforts were devoted to finding a peaceful solution through the UN. When, in the end, we were faced on 18 March with a decision to take military action against Iraq, that decision was based—in the words of the motion that this House endorsed by a majority of 263 votes—on the need to

"uphold the authority of the United Nations as set out in Resolution 1441 and many Resolutions preceding it".

Let me repeat what is in the FAC report. The Committee agreed unanimously that the decision to take military action was based not on the Government's intelligence assessments, but on the need—I quote from paragraph 3 of its report—

"to enforce unanimous Resolutions of the UN Security Council".

For all the efforts to rewrite history, I remind the right hon. Member for Devizes that intelligence was not the issue for the Opposition. In the crucial debate of 18 March, the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition said that the main issue was Iraqi defiance of the UN. He said that

"Saddam Hussein has lied to the UN for 12 years"

and that

"it should be evident to everyone that he remains in breach of the obligations under 1441."

He then listed the agents and viruses that had been identified, not by us but by Hans Blix in his report of 6 March, and recommended that

"every Member of this House read"—

that 173-page report—

"before passing judgment."

He added:

"There is a huge and powerful argument to act."

[Mr. Straw]

Indeed, he went on to say that

"if decisive action had been taken earlier, we would not now stand on the verge of war".

The Leader of the Opposition therefore concluded:

"There are matters at stake that rise above party politics. It is the duty of the Government to act in the national interest, and it is the duty of the Opposition to support them when they do so. The Prime Minister is acting in the national interest today. That is why he is entitled to our support in doing the right thing."—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2003; Vol. 401, c. 775–79.]

Dr. Julian Lewis: Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: No, I am about to close.

The Liberal Democrats' argument for a judicial inquiry is even more bizarre. They disagreed with the decision to take military action even on the basis of the intelligence that was made available. For them, intelligence was not an issue.

The decision to take military action is as justified today as it was on 18 March. Nothing in the report that the Foreign Affairs Committee published on 7 July challenges the facts on which the House's judgment was based. The Leader of the Opposition spoke for the majority of the House when he said:

"If we vote to give Saddam yet another chance, the moment will pass, our concentration will falter, our energy and our focus will disperse and our nerve will fail, with disastrous consequences for us all."—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2003; Vol. 401, c. 779.]

As for the Opposition's motion, what they describe as the "facts of the matter" now form the very heart of and backdrop to the investigations of the Intelligence and Security Committee, which was set up by Parliament. I know that the ISC will be rigorous with its witnesses, scrupulous with the intelligence material and, if necessary, unsparing in its criticism. I know, too, that—unlike a judicial inquiry—it will be able to deliver its conclusions in a timely manner, not months or years down the line when public interest has waned. A vote for the Opposition's motion would be a vote of no confidence in the Intelligence and Security Committee—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members did not mention it once: they could not utter the words. It would also be a vote of no confidence in the ability of this Parliament to have effective oversight of agencies and Ministers on intelligence matters. I urge the House to reject the motion and to accept our amendment.

1.44 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): As the right hon. Gentleman came to the end of his speech, I thought that I had strayed into Blackburn on a Saturday morning and he was on his well-known soap box.

As the Foreign Secretary rightly said, the whole House is grateful to the Foreign Affairs Committee for its report. I do not doubt for a moment that the Committee has done its best in the time available and with the information that was made available to it, but I hope that its Chairman will not think it churlish of me to say that in this context, its best is not enough. Indeed, the Committee itself implies in paragraph 29 of its recommendations, on page 5, that because it had to operate within the envelope of restriction imposed by the Government, it did not see everything or everyone.

The Foreign Secretary set great store by the Intelligence and Security Committee. No hon. Member would argue that the independence of that Committee was in doubt, nor could we argue about the fact that its access to documents and to individuals may be rather wider than that afforded to the Foreign Affairs Committee. But we cannot ignore the fact that the final contents of any report produced by that Committee may well depend upon the judgment of No. 10 Downing street as to what information about what occurred in No. 10, which has inevitably been a source of controversy, should be allowed to reach the public domain. That is why I do not shrink from saying that we need an inquiry—

Mr. Straw *rose*—

Mr. Campbell: I shall give way in a moment.

We need an inquiry that is independent of the House and of any role for the Prime Minister or any other Minister. We need an inquiry that will satisfy public opinion, which was reflected very unusually to the extent that here in London more than 1 million people took to the streets to express their anxiety, which was mirrored up and down the country on the same day.

Mr. Straw: I hope that on reflection, the right hon. and learned Gentleman will not pursue the point that there can be, or has been, any censorship of the reports and conclusions of the ISC. The Intelligence Services Act 1994 is very specific. Section 10(5), (6) and (7) make it clear that where any issues are redacted—as they sometimes have to be from FAC reports too—that has to be made patent in the report. There is no question of any of its conclusions ever being interfered with. I pray in aid the remarks of Lord King, formerly Tom King, whom we all knew, and who was Chairman of the ISC before my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor). He said:

"The reports cannot be censored."

Mr. Campbell: I accept all that. The Foreign Secretary will remember, however, that we had a debate on the annual report of the Intelligence and Security Committee only a fortnight or so ago, when the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) and I were at pains to point out that substantial parts of that report were subject to asterisks. The hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) described as an improvement the inclusion of a table that in previous years the Committee had been persuaded should not be inserted, but when I pointed out that the table was not particularly illuminating because large parts of its columns comprised asterisks, he had to agree.

What took place in No. 10 Downing street is undoubtedly a matter of controversy. The ISC is a different kind of Committee from a Select Committee of the House of Commons. It is not, in the sense in which the public would understand it, a Committee that is independent of the House of Commons. To those who argue that the House of Commons should never give up its jurisdiction over such matters, and that Committees

of the House are the only competent means of investigation. I would say that they do not understand the extent to which we are disregarded by the public. This is an issue of enormous public importance that requires an inquiry of a different kind. Such an inquiry would go much further towards restoring confidence in this institution and the way in which it operates than an investigation confined to instruments of the House of Commons.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman seriously believe that a judicial inquiry would publish sensitive national security information for everybody to read? Surely he is not suggesting that it would behave any differently from the Intelligence and Security Committee in that regard?

Mr. Campbell: Of course I do not suggest that—but introducing independent scrutiny from outside the system is much more likely to command public support than proceeding with our current method. As the Foreign Secretary said, the Intelligence and Security Committee is well able to conduct the annual scrutiny and monitoring of the activities of the three security services. However, going to war is not normal; having a million people on the streets is not normal. It is not normal to go to war when, shortly after the momentous decision—as the Foreign Secretary rightly describes it—substantial and controversial issues arise about the basis for doing so. We therefore need a solution in the form of an inquiry that does not follow the normal course.

Why should there be an inquiry? We have to be careful and not allow ourselves to be blown off course by the tempest that rages between Mr. Campbell and the BBC. When the vote was taken on 18 March, the Government's case was that Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction constituted a clear and present danger and that military force was the only way in which to protect our interests. The clear implication of that position, notwithstanding the comments of Dr. Blix on the extent of the limited co-operation that he continued to receive from the Iraqi regime, was that all other political and diplomatic options had been exhausted.

The Government, and, indeed, the Leader of the Opposition, now place great reliance on the passage that the Foreign Secretary read out earlier about the fact that some 17 United Nations Security Council resolutions had been breached, and especially that resolution 1441 authorised force. Many PhDs will be written about whether resolution 1441 authorised force, and whether the precise language in which it was couched was designed more to achieve unanimity than clarity when it passed through the Security Council.

However, there is no doubt that although clear and obvious breaches of resolutions may authorise military action, they would not make it legitimate under the normal rules of international law unless it could be demonstrated that all other diplomatic and political options had failed. Let us consider the Government's case at its best. Resolution 1441 did not absolve them of their obligation to explore alternatives or to use only force proportionate to the resolution's objectives. If, as the Prime Minister said on 25 or 26 March, after the debate on 18 March, the object was disarmament not regime change, any force that had the converse as its purpose was disproportionate. If it was disproportionate, it was illegitimate and contrary to international law.

I make that analysis to point out that the centrality of the Government's case was that weapons of mass destruction that posed a clear and present danger existed, and that, although the words "immediate" and "imminent" were not used, it was essential for the protection of our interests—political and otherwise—and those of the region, to use military force at the time.

Donald Anderson: We are hearing a skilful analysis by a persuasive advocate. However, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has not mentioned the unanimous acceptance by all members of the Security Council, in resolution 1441 of 8 November, of the threat that Saddam Hussein's regime posed. In the preamble to the resolution, all members recognised

"the threat Iraq's non-compliance with Council resolutions and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles poses to international peace and security".

Mr. Campbell: That recognises the threat, but there is dispute about whether the remainder of the terms of the resolution authorise military action. Indeed, as the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) pointed out in his resignation speech, the Government went to great lengths to obtain a second resolution but subsequently claimed that the importance of securing it was not especially great. However, their efforts to obtain a second resolution suggested that it was important.

The right hon. Member for Devizes cited a passage from resolution 1441, but we must be careful about making an assumption that the United Nations Security Council is the only fount of international law, which somehow did not exist until the charter of the United Nations appeared in San Francisco in 1947. The rules of conflict have existed for a long time; they preceded the United Nations. Proportionality, and using military force as a last resort, have been part of the code of international law for a long time. They were not undermined, and could not be swept aside, by the Security Council's passing resolution 1441. In the view of at least 13 members, it was ambiguous, certainly on whether it specifically authorised military force.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), who recently retired from the Ministry of Defence, let the cat out of the bag yesterday or the previous day when he said:

"What we are talking about here is trying to put the best gloss on your case to ensure people accept it."

Members of Parliament do that all the time; barristers and advocates are well paid for doing it. However, the legality of war, with the political, economic and social consequences, is much too important a topic on which to put a gloss to ensure that people accept it.

The question that remains is not whether Mr. Campbell had too much to do with intelligence matters in No. 10, but whether the United Kingdom went to war on a flawed prospectus. Was that flaw in the intelligence or the way in which it was handled once it reached the Government? The Prime Minister and other Ministers have been skilful at denying guilt of a charge that was not made against them. It is said that those who raise such issues are somehow accusing the Prime Minister of

[Mr. Campbell]

lying. I am not doing that. However, there may be issues not of truth but of judgment and competence. I therefore believe that an inquiry is necessary. What if similar circumstances arise in the course of this Parliament? What if a further perceived threat arises? Where will the Government find the credibility to persuade the House and the country that military action is required?

Mr. Dalyell: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is a Queen's Counsel and has a good record in such matters. I ask him a genuine question: what form should the inquiry take?

Mr. Campbell: I agreed with the Foreign Secretary in some of his criticisms about the form of inquiry that would be appropriate, and I shall deal with that subject shortly.

I caution the Government, and the House, about campaigns against the BBC. I suspect that a shoot-out between the BBC and politicians about which is the more reliable is unlikely to be resolved in our favour.

Dr. Kelly has fallen on his sword but his emergence, blinking into the sunlight, like the chorus of prisoners in "Fidelio", underlines the fact that he did not believe in the 45-minutes claim—members of the Foreign Affairs Committee who heard him yesterday will doubtless correct me if I am wrong about that. He made it clear, and the Committee accepted it, that whatever sort of contact he constituted for Mr. Gilligan, he was not his source for the broadcast on 29 May. I had the impression—perhaps a rather naive and superficial impression—that the reason why Dr. Kelly was put up by the Ministry of Defence was to undermine Mr. Gilligan. The Committee is seeing Mr. Gilligan later this week. If we are to make a judgment about Dr. Kelly's intervention in these matters so far, he seems, if anything, to have buttressed and supported the Gilligan view, rather than undermined it.

These questions certainly will not go away. That is why I believe that the case for an independent inquiry is irresistible—a point that I made to the Foreign Secretary yesterday. I do not think that he challenged me when I suggested that if he were sitting on this side of the House rather than on the Treasury Bench in a debate of this kind, he would be putting many of the same arguments that we are putting today.

Let me deal with some of the points that the Foreign Secretary has raised this afternoon. First, the Scott inquiry was not the first investigation of the issue of arms to Iraq. The Select Committee on Trade and Industry carried out an investigation right at the end of the 1987 to 1992 Parliament. It did so under the sanction of the fact that that Parliament was coming to an end and that an election was inevitable. It also did so in the face of great obstacles and considerable hindrance. At least one Minister who appeared before the Committee declined to answer questions on his role in the matter, although when he eventually had to face Mr. Geoffrey Robertson, QC, in the witness box, he was rather more forthcoming. There was also a Member of Parliament who declined to give evidence to the Committee when it was engaged on what came to be known as the Iraqi supergun inquiry, and there were certainly officials whose evidence to the inquiry was later proved to be, shall we say, neither whole nor complete.

Mr. Straw: Economical with the actualité.

Mr. Campbell: Perhaps.

Scott therefore followed an imperfect inquiry, carried out by the House of Commons under the same rules as the inquiry now being carried out by the Foreign Affairs Committee.

As for getting a busy judge to conduct the inquiry, let me remind the Foreign Secretary that Lord Cullen was a full-time judge when he was asked to conduct the inquiry into Piper Alpha, which many people regarded as a model of its kind. He was also a full-time judge when he was asked to conduct the inquiry into the Dunblane shooting tragedy. So the objection that it might be difficult to find someone who is currently exercising judicial responsibility is not necessarily one that would stand up in all circumstances.

I also believe that it is perfectly feasible to say that the inquiry would have to be completed within a prescribed time. The Foreign Secretary is right to say that from the point of view of a judge heading up an independent inquiry, there might need to be some qualification of that, and that in special or difficult circumstances, an extension might be granted. It is not beyond our wit to create an independent inquiry, headed by a senior figure from the judiciary, with a time limit within which he and his inquiry are expected to report.

The Foreign Secretary is right to say that an inquiry set up under the terms of the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921, with all the statutory implications that that would involve, might not fit the bill because of the length of time that it might take. If the Government were willing to allow the independent and impartial scrutiny that I believe to be necessary in this case, however, we should not have much difficulty in arriving at a form of inquiry that would be adequate to meet public anxiety and appropriate to get to the bottom of these questions.

In spite of the Foreign Secretary's vigour today, nothing that he has said has persuaded me other than that independent and impartial scrutiny is required here, as much for sake of the reputation of the House as for that of the Government. That is why my colleagues and I will be supporting the Opposition in the Lobby tonight.

2.4 pm

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I begin on a happy note of consensus. I note that both the mover of the motion and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary welcomed the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Committee. From that point on, however, the divergence began.

The key points of the report are set out in the summary of the conclusions and recommendations, and I need hardly go through them, save to point out that, on a great swathe of the recommendations, the all-party Committee was united. There were, of course, certain differences, but we concluded that Ministers did not mislead Parliament. The two dossiers were the focus of

the report. On the allegation that the first dossier of September 2002 had been embellished or exaggerated, the Committee concluded on the basis of the evidence before it that that had not happened. There was a divergence of opinion on the role of Mr. Campbell, but the majority—with a casting vote—agreed effectively to exonerate him. The minority was agnostic and concluded that, on the basis of the evidence available, it was unable to make a decision. That was a wholly principled view. There was no part of the Committee saying that Mr. Campbell was guilty of any particular crime. Although the Committee was therefore not unanimous, there was a substantial degree of agreement.

I am confident—I think that members of the Committee would join me in this—that the Government believed that there was a real threat of the Iraqi regime using weapons of mass destruction. What other reason could one give for the issuing of protective anti-chemical warfare uniforms to our troops? It would require a conspiratorial mind of great magnitude to imagine that our Government would have gone through the charade of equipping our forces in that way if they did not believe that the threat was real.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): The MOD gave Challenger 2 tanks sufficient chemicals for the detectors to run for only six hours. Does that reinforce the right hon. Gentleman's point? Were we selling our troops short, or were some people in the MOD not taking the threat seriously enough?

Donald Anderson: I was not aware of that fact, and I shall have to reflect on it. I know for certain, however, that our troops were equipped in the way that I have just described, and that chemical weapon kits were also found among the Iraqi soldiers. On the face of it, therefore, they too were being equipped for such a war. It is also clear from the part of resolution 1441 that I cited earlier that the United Nations Security Council accepted that the Saddam Hussein regime posed a real threat to international peace and security.

I turn briefly to the points raised in the Opposition motion. In regard to the Select Committee having had insufficient time to conduct its inquiry, the schedule for the report was set unanimously by the Committee itself. It was wholly self-imposed, and for good reasons. One reason for the admittedly tight timetable was that we wanted the report to be published in time for the issues arising from it to be discussed at the meeting of the Liaison Committee with the Prime Minister on 8 July. Any criticism of the time constraints is, therefore, a criticism of the Committee.

So far as our having had insufficient access to crucial documents in concerned, I wholly concur with what the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) has said. We stated in our report that the lack of access to such documents hampered our work. In particular, we sought interviews with the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee. In my judgment, it would have been good for the Committee—and, indeed, to the advantage of the Government—had the chairman been able to endorse orally what he had stated in writing in respect of the various letters involving Mr. Campbell, and so on.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Donald Anderson: I will, so long as I get injury time.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House why he thinks that the Government did not trust his Committee to interview the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee?

Donald Anderson: I believe that it was not a question of trust but of the Government relying—wrongly, I think—on the jurisdictional point that that was within the province of the Intelligence and Security Committee rather than the Foreign Affairs Committee. Hence, in paragraph 169 of our report, we recommended that the Government

"accede to requests from the Foreign Affairs Committee for access to intelligence, when the Committee can demonstrate that it is of key importance to a specific inquiry".

Manifestly, the request to meet the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee was not a general fishing expedition. It was wholly related to our specific inquiry and, in my judgment and that of the Committee, it should have been acceded to. I hope that when my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary looks at the recommendation—within two months, he has said—he will give careful consideration to the point that we have made, and be prepared to trust us in such matters.

The right hon. Member for Devizes made an important point in suggesting that it was now the Opposition's policy to grant the Foreign Affairs Committee access to such documents, and that they would pursue that policy if and when they were elected to govern. May I have an assurance that any future Chairman of the Committee will be able to rely wholly on the integrity of Opposition Front Benchers in that regard?

Mr. Ancram: For the sake of accuracy, let me explain what I meant to say. I think that the Committee's inability to gain access to the documents is a very good reason for instituting an independent judicial inquiry.

Donald Anderson: I am not entirely satisfied with that response. The right hon. Gentleman has accused Mr. Campbell and others of not always answering the question, and I hope that, on reflection, he will look carefully at his own answer. Mine was a very simple question: am I to assume from the right hon. Gentleman's clear statement that the Opposition now believe that the Foreign Affairs Committee should be granted access to such intelligence material in the terms of recommendation 169 of our report?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. If the right hon. Gentleman remains seated for too long, he will be in danger of losing the Floor.

Donald Anderson: That was a pregnant pause. I think that the silence of the Opposition spokesmen will be noted, for it was eloquent in its own way.

[Donald Anderson]

The only certainty about the judicial inquiry was that it would drag on for years. Even the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), with all his persuasive powers, could not surmount the point about timing, and the fact that, if some artificial time limit were set, by definition, the inquiry would not be independent.

I am reminded of a wonderful story told by Lord Weatherill. An elderly Jewish tailor to whom he was apprenticed, when given work to do on a suit, asked the customer, "Do you want it good or do you want it quick?" That may be part of the answer in this case; but all that we know about the judicial inquiry, given the precedents of Franks and Scott, is that it will take a very long time, and at the end of the day may deliver no more than can be delivered by the combination of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Intelligence and Security Committee.

We are almost certainly reaching a time when it is not just a question of looking at what Mr. Campbell did or did not say, but of focusing on the future. There has been a media circus, sometimes using the theme "Get Campbell". Yesterday, I met UK officials returning from Baghdad, who painted a very different picture from the one conveyed to us by the press. Positive things are happening on the ground in Iraq. Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said that 98 per cent. of schools there were back at work. Alas, our press will concentrate on the 2 per cent. that are not.

As a sort of historian myself, I believe that when historians examine these events they will not look at the Campbell-Gilligan spat; they will look at the big picture. Of course the prospectus on which we went to war is important, but they will look at the effect on the middle east peace process, and the reconstruction of Iraq. The new governing council may have its limitations, but at a press conference on 13 July, Talabani said

"Why do you say its powers are limited? The BBC always tries to distort Iraq's news . . . the council enjoys a relatively good number of powers"—

and he went on to list them. I believe that that, and the broad support given by a representative group of Iraqis, will be judged to be the key in the longer term.

Let me return to the Committee's report, and the welcome that it has been given on both sides. I trust that it will be agreed that our report has fully justified the decision of our all-party Committee to conduct the inquiry, and that the fact of its having been conducted largely in public will be seen as a valuable contribution to what is an important debate on the subject of going to war in Iraq.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. As I am sure all Members realise, the 12-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches is now in operation.

2.15 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): It is a pleasure to follow the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson). He has chaired the Committee during a difficult and contentious inquiry that has involved a huge amount of work in a short time with his customary skill and patience.

Yesterday, and again today, the Foreign Secretary made what I considered an extraordinary statement, suggesting that the Government did not consider the intelligence assessment that was made before the war in Iraq to be central to the issue of whether we should go to war. I put it to the right hon. Gentleman that had the Government's motion of 18 March not suggested that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, and that assessments suggested that they were there in substantial quantity, were being concealed and were likely to be effective within 45 minutes of deployment, I do not think the House could possibly have voted for it. It is profoundly disingenuous to say that war happened purely because Saddam Hussein was in breach of UN resolutions. UN resolutions are being breached throughout the world, but we do not go to war because of that.

Mr. Straw *rose—*

Sir John Stanley: I will of course give way to the Foreign Secretary, but I ask him to bear it in mind that he spoke for more than half an hour and the rest of us are limited to 12 minutes.

Mr. Straw: I think that I am right in saying that the right hon. Gentleman will be allowed an extra minute in injury time.

With respect, the right hon. Gentleman has parodied what I said. The point about the September dossier—which, I may say, was produced not least because the Foreign Affairs Committee had clamoured it for in the past and at the time—is that it made the case for action against Iraq, rather than inaction. It did not make a case for military action. The strategy followed by the Government was to get the matter into the United Nations, and to seek to resolve it peacefully. It was only as a result of Iraq's failure to comply that we then brought the matter to the House.

As for the issue of the 45 minutes, which was mentioned earlier by another Conservative Member, as far as I know it was not mentioned by a single Member on 18 March.

Sir John Stanley: The Foreign Secretary says that I parodied his words. Yesterday, he said:

"the intelligence assessments that were provided formed part of the background, but they were not the heart of the argument and never were."—[*Official Report*, 15 July 2003; Vol. 129, c. 162.]

For a great many of us who voted on 18 March, the intelligence assessments were not part of the background at all; they were absolutely part of the foreground—part of the heart of the matter.

As for our armed forces in Iraq, who had to put their lives on the line for the war, let me draw the Foreign Secretary's attention to a paper placed in the House of Commons Library at the time: the Government's own paper entitled "Iraq: the Military Campaign Objectives". The very first paragraph states:

"The prime objective remains to rid Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction and their associated programmes and means of delivery, including prohibited ballistic missiles, as set out in the relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions".

That was the first and overriding military objective: to rid Saddam Hussein of the weapons of mass destruction that were the basis of the intelligence assessments put before the House.

I want to say something about those assessments, and, in particular, the key assessment placed before the House in the dossier of September last year. I start with the issue of uranium from Africa. That was no minor issue but a central plank of the Government's assessment that Saddam Hussein's regime was attempting to recommence its nuclear weapons programme. What we know about the uranium from Africa story is that Mr. el-Baradei revealed to the UN in February this year that the Niger allegations were based on forged documents. We now know, from the work of the Foreign Affairs Committee—it is mentioned in the Committee's report—that the insertion of the story about uranium from Africa was, like the 45-minute claim, a suspiciously last-minute insertion into the document.

Significantly, and remarkably, we learned last Friday for the first time, from the letter that the Foreign Secretary released to the right hon. Member for Swansea, East, that the CIA had expressed reservations to the British Government at the time that the September dossier was published about the inclusion of the claim about uranium from Africa. The Committee has taken evidence from the Foreign Secretary on that point and on the source behind the statement in the dossier. All that I can say in this public forum is that we await with great interest the views of the Intelligence and Security Committee on the adequacy, or otherwise, of the source for that information.

The 45-minute claim is of huge significance, not because of the Campbell allegations, which—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) said—have been a smokescreen and a diversion. It is important because the Government highlighted that claim in the September 2002 dossier. It appeared no less than four times—in the Prime Minister's foreword, in the executive summary and in two other places. That 45-minute claim underpinned completely the Government's claim for the immediacy of the need to take military action. Those who voted on 18 March had to consider carefully their position if they failed to support the Government, given that they had been advised by the Prime Minister, with access to all the information available, that Saddam Hussein was a dictator who had used WMD before and now had them ready and available to use within 45 minutes. That was a significant claim.

The Foreign Affairs Committee took evidence in public and in private, and of course I cannot reveal what was told to us in private. However, I am entitled, as an individual member of the Committee, to offer my own personal conclusions on the validity of the 45-minute claim. My conclusions are, first, that the intelligence base for the claim was very narrow and, secondly, that the accuracy of that intelligence base could not be guaranteed.

It remains to be seen whether that intelligence will be validated on the ground. I do not rule out the possibility that the Iraq survey group may discover, hidden in some clever and fiendish way, chemical or biological weapons ready to use and located within 45 minutes of the appropriate delivery systems in place in Iraq at the relevant time. However, if no such discoveries were made, that would not surprise me in the least.

Mr. Dalyell: Can the right hon. Gentleman say anything about the deterioration of any chemical weapons that Iraq may have had in the late 1980s or early 1990s?

Sir John Stanley: That is an issue on which we took public evidence. The published volume of evidence contains some interesting evidence from an expert witness who worked at Porton Down and has great experience on the issue.

The third question is the biggest: the key issue of whether or not there were weapons of mass destruction, especially chemical and biological weapons, irrespective of whether or not they were within 45 minutes of being ready to use. On that issue, the Committee concluded that the jury is out. I was amazed that the Prime Minister, before the Liaison Committee and in answer to the right hon. Member for Swansea, East, said that the jury was not out. I do not understand on what basis the Prime Minister made that statement. The jury is clearly out, because no chemical or biological munitions have been found, and that is a key issue.

As of today, nearly four months after we invaded Iraq, none of the central intelligence assessment claims in the September 2002 dossier has been validated on the ground. No evidence has been uncovered that Saddam Hussein was restarting his nuclear weapons programme. We have no evidence of imports of uranium from Africa or of continued production of chemical and biological weapons. We have no evidence of up to 20 longer-range ballistic missiles capable of reaching British bases in Cyprus or of chemical and biological weapons that could be deployed within 45 minutes. We have no evidence of any weapons of mass destruction at all so far. Perhaps that will change with some dramatic discovery by the Iraq survey group, but if by the time it has completed its work we are in the same position as today, it will raise serious personal issues for the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Prime Minister.

2.27 pm

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Before I decided to take part in this debate, I thought that I would read what I had said in the debate on 24 September—in case another hon. Member raised it—and what reason I had given for supporting the Government. I talked then about someone who was a member of CARDRI—the Campaign against Repression and for Democratic Rights in Iraq—most of his political life, who worked against Saddam Hussein and who opposed those who sold weapons to him. That person, because of his other interests in the middle east, also had a sneaking hope that perhaps Iraq could use its military influence to put pressure on the middle east peace process to bring it to a conclusion. However, he was regularly let down by Saddam Hussein, who allegedly supported the Palestinians but who did things that were against the interests of peace in the middle east and the Palestinians specifically. One need only look at how Palestinians were treated in Iraq—they were subsumed into the Iraqi army as part of the defence forces—to understand that

[Mr. Ernie Ross]

although Saddam sought to interfere in the peace process by rewarding those who carried out acts of terrorism on the west bank, he did not assist the peace process itself. I still had the lingering hope that he might have played a useful role, but he did not.

It was obvious that things had to change in Iraq. As hon. Members said, children were dying in Iraq and people were suffering under Saddam Hussein. Getting rid of Saddam was desirable, but it had to be done in a legitimate way that was consistent with international law. At the same time, however, contradictions existed in respect of international law, Iraq, and this House.

As I said, I refreshed my memory of my previous speech, in which I made the point that

"if we do not get the United Nations resolution, and if we do not get the inspectors back and the removal of the weapons of mass destruction, in my judgment regime change would indeed be justified—if necessary, by military means."—[*Official Report*, 24 September 2002; Vol. 390, c. 85.]

Why was I thinking that way? I think that it was not so much because I was impressed by any particular dossier, but because the Americans were prepared to go back to the UN to get resolution 1441. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary made the commitment that we would work for a specific resolution. That caused me to support the Government in that period.

Towards the end of my speech on 24 September, I said that I hoped that we would get a specific resolution. I have worked in international law, with special reference to the middle east, and I am aware of how non-specific and ambiguous most UN resolutions can be. However, 1441 was as specific as it could have been; it was certainly one of the most specific resolutions that I have seen. When the second resolution was not achieved, I found no problem in voting for action against Saddam Hussein, his family and his regime on the grounds of his non-compliance.

If we learned one thing about Saddam Hussein, it was that he was a complete Stalinist and a unilateralist. He signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and the chemical weapons convention, but flouted them immediately. He agreed to the UN ceasefire in 1991, under which he was to give up nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, but then spent a decade lying, cheating, and hiding. He deliberately denied the inspectors access and did not allow them to do their job. He attempted to conceal weapons in all sorts of places, and put pressure on scientists to deny that weapons programmes were going on.

We had to bring Saddam Hussein to account. The House had debated the question of sanctions and their impact on the people of Iraq, but we had never really been able to deal with the subject. The closed nature of Iraqi society led some of us to believe that we could use the mosque system in the Muslim community to get aid to people and children in Iraq. However, that proved to be impossible. The Stalinist running Iraq was clearly capable of taking anyone on. The fear that he instilled made certain that people would never attempt to undermine anything that he did.

The Ba'ath party and Saddam Hussein exploited the oil-for-food programme for their own benefit. They denied food and essential medical supplies and material to the people and children of Iraq, including the Marsh Arabs, at great, ongoing and deadly cost. The Iraqi elite, however, were not denied food. They lived in Saddam's palaces and enjoyed a lifestyle that was revealed by the coalition forces to have been way beyond anything imaginable.

The no-fly zones were another reason why I said that I would be happy to support regime change. The zones, in both the north and south of Iraq, were highly dubious and were not legitimate under international law. I recall their being debated in this House when I was a member of the Opposition, on the other side of the Chamber. I told the then Foreign Secretary—now Lord Hurd—that there was no international law that allowed us to put the no-fly zones in place. I know that the Foreign Office considered that it could find a suitable framework in international law, but the legality of the no-fly zones is still the subject of argument.

Nevertheless, the no-fly zones saved the Marsh Arabs and allowed them to survive. Saddam was able to drain the marshes, but the Marsh Arabs survived. By the same token, the northern no-fly zones allowed the Kurds to develop a society. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in his statement yesterday, the coalition forces are now feeding 26 million people. He said:

"Preliminary figures for June show that food rations were distributed to about 26 million Iraqis in a target population of 27 million. Food distribution is being extended to the Marsh Arabs, a people who I understand received no food at all under Saddam Hussein."—[*Official Report*, 15 July 2003; Vol. 409, c. 153.]

The no-fly zones allowed people to survive, and we are now feeding those people.

The Iraqi Kurds had been fighting among themselves, having been turned against each other by Saddam Hussein. Once they had resolved their issues, the northern no-fly zone allowed them to develop a society and infrastructure, one result of which was an improvement in the child mortality rate. When an administration was established, the first thing that the Iraqi Kurds did was to affirm the territorial integrity of Iraq. They did not attempt to move towards breaking away from Iraq, but said that they wanted to form a government. They are now part of the provisional authority in Iraq.

The Iraqi Kurds have survived because of the no-fly zones, even though those zones were illegal. The British and Americans broke international law and, in so doing, allowed the survival of people in Iraq who would not have survived otherwise. It is clear that we were dealing with a person in such complete control of Iraq that we in this House could not have allowed the weapons inspectors to continue for much longer.

I shall not comment on the Foreign Affairs Committee report. I am not in a position to do so, and I do not want to disagree with the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley). However, although he did not mean to, when he spoke about his own view of information that he had received he gave a clear indication as to what that information—to which

we are not privy—might have been. Whether he intended to or not, people will be bound to look at his speech to try and ascertain what the information was.

Sir John Stanley: I made it quite clear that I was expressing my personal conclusions.

Mr. Ross: I appreciate what the right hon. Gentleman says, but he had said earlier that the Committee had received a specific briefing. People are bound to draw an inference, and see an implication, when two such statements are made in the same paragraph. That is a danger for Select Committees; they need to work out how to handle the information that they are given.

The way ahead for the House is to welcome the report and to look forward to the Foreign Secretary's response. Much more important, however, is dealing with the more immediate problems of Iraq and the middle east. On 14 and 15 April this year, my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) and I attended a conference in Doha, in Qatar. The experience was amazing. Although there was anger among the Arab participants about the action of the coalition forces, it was anger that someone had had to come from outside to do what they should probably have done themselves. They hoped that if we could give the Iraqi people the opportunity, they would demonstrate that they could run their country. That is the message that the Foreign Secretary gave us yesterday.

2.41 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): It seems that much of the past parliamentary year has been dominated by Iraq and the situation and circumstances leading up to our debate on 18 March. I congratulate the Foreign Affairs Committee on its report, although it is a pity that the Committee could not agree more generally on many issues. Some of the conclusions were pushed through on the Chairman's casting vote, which shows that the Committee was not wholly united on some serious questions.

The changes in the Government's attitude are interesting. Like many Members, I received numerous letters in the run-up to the debate on 18 March trying to persuade me not to support the war and that what the Government were doing was wrong. However, it was the first time that I had seen the Prime Minister take on public opinion. He did so because he passionately believed that he was right. I took the view that, if a right-wing American President and a centre-left British Prime Minister were assuring the House of Commons that there was grave danger to our country, we would have been foolish and, in some respects, irresponsible not to accept that assurance and that warning.

We had not held such a debate before, and it was with a heavy heart that I supported the war, because I was aware that people would lose their lives in conflict as a result of my using my vote. In conflict, lives are always lost. Sadly, that has been true for a number of families in this country, who have been devastated by the war—it will live with them for ever.

Sometimes, tough decisions have to be taken and the Prime Minister was courageous in the way that he persuaded the House. He spoke with a conviction that we have not heard from him before. As I said earlier, he took on public opinion, which, undoubtedly, was not with him.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), the Leader of the Opposition, throughout the run-up to, and the entirety of, the conflict in Iraq, also showed a sense of duty. He showed the right way for an Opposition to conduct themselves on such major issues. Had there been a Labour Opposition at that time, would we have had a similar response from the leader of the Labour party?

David Cairns: What about the Falklands?

Mr. McLoughlin: Yes, Labour did give support on the Falklands.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): Does the hon. Gentleman recall the support that the then leader of the Labour party, Neil Kinnock, gave the Conservative Government during the first Gulf war?

Mr. McLoughlin: I accept that. But the first Gulf war was far easier to understand. There was an invasion, so it was easier to see the necessity for recapture. No vote was taken on that war, and most of the debates at that time were held on the Adjournment at the request of the then Opposition—*[Interruption.]* I was merely wondering whether, if there had been a substantive vote on such a matter, there would have been similar support from a Labour Opposition.

I want to explain why there should be a public inquiry and why this situation is different: I cannot recall a Cabinet Minister who had sat at the Cabinet table during the Falklands conflict and the first Gulf war, saying after those events that the Government's action had been wrong. On this occasion, that has happened. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Clare Short) was a long-serving member of the Cabinet and she voted for the war, but now she says:

> "I have concluded that the PM had decided to go to war in August sometime and he duped us all along. He had decided for reasons that he alone knows to go to war over Iraq and to create this sense of urgency and drive it: the way the intelligence was spun was part of that drive. There was political spin put on the intelligence information to create a sense of urgency. It was a political decision that came from the Prime Minister. We were misled: I think we were deceived in the way it was done . . . The suggestion that there was a risk of chemical and biological weapons being weaponised and threatening us in a short time was spin...That didn't come from the security services."

That was a member of the Cabinet, someone who had access to information.

What did the former Leader of the House and the Foreign Secretary's predecessor say? The right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) called for a public inquiry. The calls for a public inquiry are not coming merely from an opportunist Opposition; they reflect serious concern in the nation about our deploying our forces in war. I believe that the Government are committing a serious folly by not accepting that such an inquiry should take place. People are asking what the Government have to hide. If they have nothing to hide, why are they afraid of the inquiry?

[Mr. McLoughlin]

I say sincerely to Members on the Treasury Bench that it comes a little rich from the Government when they tell us that the inquiry will take time, or when the Foreign Secretary told us, as he did a little while ago, of the huge cost of such a public inquiry, because the Labour Government have held more inquiries into the actions of the previous Government than ever before. We have had the Phillips inquiry, the Bloody Sunday inquiry and others that the Prime Minister has launched into the actions of the Conservative Government. Not so long ago, the Prime Minister used to accuse the Conservatives of being responsible for BSE, and he set up the Phillips inquiry. He can no longer make that charge, because the inquiry showed that his allegations were rubbish.

The Government have seriously mishandled Iraq since the war. That point cannot be made too strongly. They could have retained the unanimity of the parties as they moved forward. The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) mentioned Labour support for Baroness Thatcher when, as Prime Minister, she deployed her troops in the south Atlantic. Referring to the "awkward squad" in a response to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), the then leader of the Labour party said:

"I can assure him that, if he had been a member of the last Labour Cabinet, he would know that my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Lever qualifies for that appellation better than anyone else in the country, rising even to the high standards of my hon. Friend the Member for West Lothian".

In those days, Michael Foot was very content that the inquiry should go ahead. He went on to say,

"For the rest, I believe that what the right hon. Lady has proposed is right and that the House would be wise to support it. I emphasise what she said, and what we have always understood in our discussions, about the fullness of the report to be made to the House and to the country. That is an absolute requirement, but I do not believe that there has been any difference between us on that."—[*Official Report*, 8 July 1982; Vol. 27, c. 477.]

What happened this year was right. Getting rid of Saddam Hussein has been a lesson to world order. I was immensely impressed, as I am sure were many of my hon. Friends, by the speech of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) during the many debates that we had in the lead-up to the decision. We certainly did not expect her to propose that course of action. She was clear in her own mind. She said that she would support the Government if it were only a case of regime change. She was in no doubt about that. However, that was not the assurance that the Government gave us—it was not what the Prime Minister assured us was the reason for doing it.

I cannot understand why the Government are now so reluctant—why the matter has been so mishandled. For example, Alastair Campbell was not going to appear before the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, then he appeared before it and then we had that incredible outburst on the Channel 4 news of the same night and, all of a sudden, the Prime Minister's reputation has been put in grave jeopardy. If it has been put in jeopardy, it is because of the way he has run his Government in the past six years. They have become a Government almost created by spin and run by spin, but on a matter such as war we should get to the truth and that is why we should have an inquiry.

2.52 pm

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): In the last few moments of his speech, the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) let the cat out of the bag. He said that he agreed with the Government, he thought that what we did in Iraq was right and getting rid of Saddam Hussein was right. He just does not like the Government. He does not like the fact that we did that and he is going to find some reason to oppose it.

Earlier, the hon. Gentleman made a disgraceful slur against the patriotism of former Labour leaders by saying that they would not have supported military action. I think that I have to go back to George Lansbury to find a Labour leader who did not support British troops—*[Interruption.]*—other than Suez.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

David Cairns: The hon. Gentleman may be about to mention that subject, but I recommend him not to drag it up at this point if he wants to keep me with this case.

Dr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman has guessed wrongly. One thing that is worth remembering about the Falklands is that at the time there was a man who was about to become Labour leader—Neil Kinnock—who wholly opposed that expedition and said so publicly at a time when our troops were being deployed.

David Cairns: This really is the stuff of desperation. The Conservatives make an allegation that turns out to be complete nonsense and then they scan the Labour Back Benches for people who were about to become leader of the Labour party and might have supported it. They should think before they make those absurd allegations.

I join the long queue of people who are thanking and praising the Foreign Affairs Committee for its reports. The Chairman said, I think with a little irony, that everyone was standing up to praise the report but going on to say that it was inadequate because the Committee did not have access to the information, because there should be a further judicial inquiry or whatever.

For someone such as myself who is a new Member of Parliament and approaches these issues with trepidation in the presence of people who know far more about them, the report was an extraordinarily useful primer into the workings of the intelligence agencies and the way that intelligence is gathered, filtered and compiled. It is an excellent case study into how that happens. I am sure that everyone here has read it, but I commend it to people outside who have not done so. The Committee asked some specific questions of the Government and I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary assure the House that he would deal with those within the two-month period that he has to respond in full to the report. We will await his reply with interest.

In an excellent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) did well to remind us of the broader context within which the decisions were taken. After all, the report is entitled "The Decision to go to War in Iraq", not "Finding out whether a dossier was dodgy", nor is it about a particular claim about 45

minutes. It was about the decision in the broadest sense and my hon. Friend did well to bring us back to what really matters.

The United Kingdom did not pluck Iraq out of thin air or stick a needle into an atlas and say, "There's a country that we do not like. We'll manufacture evidence to make up some sort of case for deposing a leader who is inconvenient to us." That simply did not happen. As my hon. Friend reminded us, we must remember the 17 UN resolutions on Iraq and the action that had been taken up to that date—the no-fly zones as well as the sanctions against Saddam Hussein's regime. It was not the UK's intelligence services alone that were making allegations about weapons of mass destruction—it was not only the United States intelligence services that were making those claims.

I am not one of those hon. Members who is in the habit of hanging out with members of the intelligence and security forces—at least, not that I am aware of—but I recently had an opportunity with some colleagues to meet a former head of the very well-known national security service of another country. I appreciate that this story is anecdotal and that there were no minutes, so hon. Members cannot challenge whether what I am saying is true, but I asked that gentlemen, who has many years' experience in the field, whether the weapons of mass destruction existed, whether we were duped, and if they did exist where they were. He told me in clear terms that I should be in no doubt that the entire world intelligence community had those doubts, knew that Saddam Hussein had been developing weapons of mass destruction and was continuing that programme with varying degrees of success. As we know, he had attempted to implement it in various ways with varying degrees of success.

Therefore, it was not a case of the UK acting alone or acting with a right-wing American President; it was the expression of the entire world community, which culminated in resolution 1441. That resolution was passed unanimously by countries including France, Russia and Syria, and it was acknowledged that there was a genuine threat from Saddam Hussein and his weapons of mass destruction. That is important. This was not a huge propaganda exercise got up by Alastair Campbell—he is not that powerful or influential. The Conservative party is throwing up a smokescreen by pursuing that route.

At heart, we are all—the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley), the hon. Member for West Derbyshire and my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West—reflecting on why we voted to go to war. We are asking ourselves, "Why did I cast that vote? What was the evidence base upon which I cast it?" Two dossiers were uppermost in my mind when I cast my vote in support of military action. I read them very carefully and they swayed me. I regret to tell my hon. Friend the Minister that they were not the dossiers of September and February that the Government produced; they were two distinct dossiers. One was a Command Paper that put together all 17 of the UN resolutions against Saddam Hussein one after the other, with their 29 separate obligations on Iraq and Saddam Hussein, the majority of which had been unfulfilled to that point. Reading those resolutions consecutively brought home powerfully to me that the entire world community was concerned about the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. Of course, the resolutions culminated in 1441.

The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) told us that he thought that the fact that the Government were attempting to secure a further resolution after 1441 demonstrated that they were not convinced of the legal basis given by 1441 for going to war. I refute that—that is not my understanding of why the Government were attempting to secure a second resolution. They openly said that it would be politically preferable to have that position explicitly set out in a new resolution. *[Interruption.]* I recommend that my hon. Friends who are dissenting from that view consider what was said at the time by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), who argued very cogently that we were voting not to go to war, but to support resolution 1441. He said very clearly that he would not vote for that because resolution 1441 provided a basis for further military action. He was opposed to that then, and it was a very principled stand to take. I listened to him and argued with him at the time, but not about whether resolution 1441 provided a basis to go to war, as we agreed about that.

Jeremy Corbyn: Does my hon. Friend not recall that the Prime Minister asserted very strongly that not only would he go for a second resolution, but that he intended to get one and that, after he failed to get one, he told the House in terms that we were going to war to disarm Saddam Hussein of weapons of mass destruction, which has so far proved—how shall I put it—difficult to justify?

David Cairns: I was agreeing with my hon. Friend right up until the last point that he made. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister should be congratulated on trying to go for a second—or an 18th or 19th—resolution and on the way in which his influence on the American President brought him into the whole process at the United Nations in the first place, so I do not accept that resolution 1441 provided no legal basis for the military action that was taken.

I mentioned two dossiers, and the Command Paper was uppermost in my mind at the time of going to war. The second dossier is the last report of the weapons inspectors, which was produced in early March and runs to 167 pages in the original version and 173 pages in the final version. Reading that document—page after page about the Iraqi regime's non-compliance with the weapons inspectors—helped to convince me that that regime would simply never comply with the weapons inspectors because it had no intention of ever doing so. That put the regime in clear contradiction of UN resolution 1441, which provided a basis for such action.

Either way, we cast our votes on whether or not to engage in military action on that fateful night, certainly in the knowledge that, as the hon. Member for West Derbyshire said, if we voted for war and war came, there would be casualties and deaths. I put it to him and to hon. Members who voted not to go to war that, if we had not gone to war and deposed Saddam Hussein, people would have died in any event, perhaps in even greater numbers than died in the short conflict. We must not forget that vital point.

[David Cairns]

Of course, the judicial inquiry issue is the gravamen of the motion. I found it extraordinary that the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) complained that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spent so much time addressing that issue when that is what the motion calls for. The entire motion is one long preamble, with a specific call at the end for an independent inquiry. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary demolished that case in his very effective speech, but the right hon. Gentleman simply said in response that it was unfair that my right hon. Friend addressed the judicial inquiry issue.

The only time that Opposition Members mention judicial inquiries is when they are asking for them to be stopped, and the hon. Member for West Derbyshire complained about the cost of the Saville inquiry and the length of time that it has taken.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

David Cairns: No, I will not give way; I have less than a minute left to speak.

The Saville inquiry is considering not a previous Government, but what happened on a fateful day in Northern Ireland.

I believe that we were right to go to war. I believe that history will show that that was the right thing to do. I believe that weapons of mass destruction will be found in that massive country, which is the size of France, when the inspectors go about their job unhindered by the Iraqi regime. I will await the outcome of the Intelligence and Security Committee, and I have confidence in its ability to get to the heart and truth of this matter.

3.4 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I do not know whether weapons of mass destruction will be found. I believe that they probably will be, but I agree very much with the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) when he talked about being most influenced by the Command Paper that tabulated all the United Nations resolutions. On this occasion, if perhaps on no other, the hon. Gentleman and I are very much on the same side.

I am bound to say that when the House, very ill advisedly in my view, changed its hours, I hoped that there might be the compensating advantage that short debates early in the afternoon would at least be attended by the protagonists. Yet it is perhaps less than an hour before the winding-up speeches and there is no Foreign Secretary and no shadow Foreign Secretary. The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) has, to his credit, returned to the Chamber, but where is the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, whose report is central to the debate? He made his speech and off he went.

I have a great regard for the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, but his place is above all in the Chamber while this matter is being debated. I am particularly sorry that he is not here because I want to talk a little bit about the Foreign Affairs Committee. I had the privilege of serving on it until a few weeks ago. I voted with the Government and against setting up a judicial inquiry when we last debated this issue. I made it plain that I was unhappy about the fact that the Foreign Affairs Committee had decided to embark on this road and I said then, and I have said since, that I believe that the Intelligence and Security Committee is the right Committee to investigate the matter. I still hold to that view.

The report, published after prodigious labour and a great deal of burning of midnight oil, has not taken us very much further forward, save to indicate that the one degree of unanimity appears to be that the members of the Foreign Affairs Committee do not believe that the House was deliberately misled. That at least is good, but I argued on the Foreign Affairs Committee that we should not have this inquiry. I did not leave the Foreign Affairs Committee specifically because of that. I do not want to mislead the House myself. I had already informed my hon. Friend the deputy Chief Whip and the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee that, for various reasons that they fully understood, I would not remain on the Committee beyond the end of the summer. I came to that conclusion very reluctantly.

When we came to discuss this issue, I argued—the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) knows this very well, as he is a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee—very forcefully that we should not have the inquiry. I asked for my dissent to be minuted, and it was. When I then discovered that I could not, for very good reason, attend two crucial sittings, I felt that I should not put myself or my colleagues in the position where I would probably write a minority report not having heard all the evidence. No one should put his name to that report, for or against, without hearing every last bit of evidence.

So I brought forward my withdrawal and the House discharged me from the Committee, and my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) was appointed in my stead. I wish him happy years on the Committee, but he has not been able to begin on a very good note because one of the great defining characteristics of Select Committees is that they try to examine issues without being over-influenced by party prejudice. The Select Committee reports that have most effect in the House—I speak as someone who has been a Member for a very long time and been involved in a number of such reports—are those that are unanimous or near unanimous.

The Committee has done what I prophesied would happen if it embarked on the inquiry: it has divided more or less on party lines. On one or two occasions, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) voted with my right hon. and hon. Friends, but the Committee has divided more or less on party lines, and I believe that that is a very great pity indeed. It will undermine the effectiveness of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and it will take a long while to recover from that.

Sir John Stanley: I invite my hon. Friend to look at the Votes and Proceedings, and he will see not merely that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew

Mackinlay) voted with both Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members, but that the Chairman of the Committee also did so on two or three occasions.

Sir Patrick Cormack: My right hon. Friend's intervention, frankly, in no way demolishes the point that I am making. If one looks at the significant Divisions, one finds that they were along party lines. One even finds that what was arguably the most significant Division of all was carried by the casting vote of the Chairman. That is a fact; it is there for everyone to read, and it does not reflect credit on the House when that sort of thing happens with one of its very senior Select Committees. I deeply regret that because I cherished my membership of that Committee. I tried to be an assiduous member, and I wish it every possible success in the future. That is totally genuine.

When we come to this particular issue, however, nothing has significantly changed apart from the attitude of Her Majesty's loyal Opposition. I deeply regret that. I thought that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition made a brave and proper speech in support of the Prime Minister on 18 March. The Prime Minister made what was probably the best prime ministerial speech that I have heard in 33 years in this House. I have certainly never heard a better one. It was as good as that by Mrs. Thatcher on the Falklands and other great prime ministerial speeches that I have been privileged to hear. When the Prime Minister addressed this House, as I said in the previous debate, I believe that he spoke in good faith.

Of course, the so-called dodgy dossier incident was not particularly well handled. Does that seriously alter the material facts of the case, however? No, it does not. One is tempted to think that dodgy dossiers have had a place in the history of the Labour party—I am surprised that no one has yet resurrected the Zinoviev letter. The fact is, however, that although elements of the Government's handling could have been better, although the Prime Minister, as I have said before, has created difficulties for himself by his over-reliance on spin on many issues, and although he has my implacable opposition to many things that he has done and proposes to do—and will continue to have it—nevertheless, on this issue, he behaved as a proper national leader should. He had the support from my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary that he deserved. Nothing that has happened since has altered my opinion on that.

I must say this to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench: rehearsing the mantra, "Nobody will ever believe a word that he says," does no good to them, the political process or this place. Yes, Labour Members did it to us as our Government fell apart between 1992 and 1997. By visiting on them what they did to us, or seeking to do so, especially over a grave national issue, however, we serve only to increase public cynicism and dislike of the political process, on which the House should be united to allay and to answer.

I therefore beg my right hon. and hon. Friends to take heed of a quotation from Jonathan Swift:

"Lash the vice but spare the name".

Attack the judgment but do not impugn the sincerity.

On this issue above all, let us not undermine the honourable credibility of our position as the Opposition by nitpicking over these matters, which do not affect the material issues that we are discussing—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) says from a sedentary position that this is a question of weapons of mass destruction. No one who has studied the matter, who has taken part in the debates in the House, or who was here at the time of the first Gulf war, can doubt that we were dealing with one of the most evil tyrants to deface the world scene since the second world war. No one can doubt that not only did he have the capacity to produce weapons of mass destruction but that he produced weapons of mass destruction. What was the state of those particular weapons at the time that we went to war in March I do not know, and I do not much care. I believe that the decision to go to war was entirely justified. All the UN resolutions, which were detailed in the Command Paper, and which showed this man thumbing his nose at the international community, gave sufficient justification for this country to go to war.

It grieves me deeply that my party, to which I am honoured to belong, should have started nitpicking when it was so right to give support on the principal issue. It also grieves me that those young men and women in Iraq at the moment—I have spoken to some of them, and we still have 11,000 out there—are wondering whether we have lost our marbles in this place. They are helping to bring to Iraq—a country that has been subjugated to an evil regime for the best part of half a century and that has never known democracy—an infrastructure, both physical and political, that will allow that nation to exploit properly in its own interests its indigenous oil wealth and to become a force for stability in the middle east and in the world beyond. What do we do? We spend our time looking at these silly accusations, which have no substance, and I am ashamed of my party for doing it. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will desist—certainly, if they do not, I will not.

Let us move on. Perhaps there is a paucity of attendance in the Chamber this afternoon because our colleagues think that we have said enough.

3.16 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack), in his customary candid and robust way, has expressed many of the views that I hold. I have on many occasions argued for regime change. I believe that it was the right thing to do. I might have wished for a different approach to it, and I tried to argue many times in this House that it was possible to indict members of the regime in the same way that Milosevic was indicted while he was still head of state. It was unfortunate that despite INDICT—the organisation that I chair—taking evidence to the Governments of four countries, including this one, not one Government was prepared to act on the evidence that we had given them. That would have been my preferred option, as I am sure it would have been for many other Members of the House. I also thank the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) for his kind words.

Clearly, when one has seen and been involved for such a long time in events in Iraq, one can describe them with some passion and conviction, and in the belief that something ought to have been done. I believed as far back as 1984 that something needed to be done. In 1987,

[Ann Clwyd]

I was chair of an organisation called CARDRI—the Campaign against Repression and for Democratic Rights in Iraq—which was the only pressure group in this country that highlighted the excesses of Saddam Hussein's regime. The group wrote newsletters, published books and used every opportunity to try to make the world take notice of the atrocities that had taken place since the beginning of Saddam Hussein's regime. In 1987, I put out a newsletter on behalf of CARDRI that called for Saddam Hussein to be divested of his chemical and biological weapons.

In 1988, Halabja took place. No one took any notice of what we had said in 1987. This country continued to sell arms to the Iraqi regime and to deal with members of the regime as though they were honourable people—of course they were not. In 1988, I also took a group of women from the House of Commons to visit some of the survivors of Halabja in a London hospital.

At the beginning of this year—the last time that I spoke to the House about my visits to Iraq—the Kurds took me to the area of the country between Chamchamal and the road to Kirkuk, which was the dividing area between Saddam's Iraq and the Kurdish part of Iraq. The Kurds pointed to rockets on the hillside. They believed that chemical and biological warheads were to be fired in their direction. They were so convinced of that that they asked me to ask our Prime Minister to provide them with protective suits. I made that point to the Prime Minister and in the Chamber on my return. The Kurds contacted me several times during the following weeks to ask when they would receive the protection. They were close to everything that was going on and had their own intelligence. They sincerely believed that chemical and biological warheads existed, although I do not know whether they did or not.

I did not make an argument about weapons of mass destruction. I argued that we needed to take action in Iraq for humanitarian reasons. When I spoke in March about the plastic shredder that was used to kill in one of Saddam's prisons, I never imagined that only a month ago in Baghdad—after the war—I would read in a chillingly meticulous record that one of the methods of execution in Saddam's prisons was mincing—that was the translation from the Arabic. I had finished a press conference at the British embassy in Baghdad when a person from Fox television asked me to take a dossier that the company had been given that was an account of methods of execution. I read some of the methods outlined in the 56 pages—they were horrific.

The Abu Ghraib prison is the largest in Iraq. Since the early 1980s, I have read about executions that took place there and methods used by the regime to deal with its opponents in the prison. I visited the prison in the company of the Americans. When we reached the gate, it was locked, and the people inside refused to open it until they had received instructions from a higher military commander. We stood around for some time talking to children who were playing around the prison. The prison could house up to 75,000 people. The total prison population of this country is about 75,000, so those people could be contained in that prison alone. The 15 and 16-year-old boys who were playing around the prison had been guards there. They told us that only one day before the Americans arrived at the prison, the remaining prisoners had been killed. They had been stood in trenches up their waists and shot through the head.

There are murals of Saddam Hussein on the corridors of the prison, which is gruesome beyond imagination. The murals show Saddam with a hawk on his shoulder, Saddam with a rocket launcher with a dove in its barrel and Saddam in a silk shirt with a cigar. His victims were taken from dark and overcrowded cells to the execution block that had ceiling hooks and levers that catapulted them to a grizzly death in the pits below. Some remained alive, so the guards broke their necks by standing on them. The United Nations could have continued passing resolutions for the next 50 years and sending inspectors and rapporteurs into Iraq, but in the end, despite my reservations, there was no realistic alternative to war.

When I was in Iraq, the people on the streets to whom I talked were irritated because the debate on weapons of mass destruction was raging here at the time. When I asked them what they thought about the weapons, they were amazed that anyone was talking about them at all. They said, "Don't they care about us? Don't they care about the mass graves? Don't they care about the torture?" I assured them that we did care about all those things but that people were nevertheless worried about weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Dalyell: If that is the only side of the story, how does my hon. Friend explain the attacks on American troops in Baghdad, which happen day in, day out and are alas increasing? That is lamentable.

Ann Clwyd: It is lamentable; my hon. Friend is right. But he must know some of the reasons for that. An Iraqi friend in this country, who had a brother in the Iraqi army for 35 years to whom he had spoken recently on the telephone, was told that people are being offered $600 a head for shooting at American soldiers. Of course, my hon. Friend must know that there are also the remnants of the regime—the remnants of the Ba'ath party who have so much to lose because the regime has gone, and the fedayeen who fought for Saddam. There are also extremists. For all those reasons, there is still insecurity in the country.

For people to feel secure in Iraq now, it is imperative that they know that Saddam Hussein is either dead or arrested. They need to know that his two terrible sons are either dead or arrested. That is necessary because people feel insecure. When I spoke to people on the streets, they said, and this is no exaggeration, "Thanks to Bush and Blair." That was said to me many times. Sometimes I would ask a man a question and he would turn his head away. When I asked why he was doing that, I was told, "He thinks that the Ba'athists are still watching him, and if they come back into power, he will get into trouble." That is the level of concern that the people still feel.

I say to my hon. Friend: stand at the mass grave at al-Hillah, where between 10,000 and 15,000 people are buried, hands tied behind their backs, bullets through their brains. Look at the pitiful possessions on the ground that the forensic scientists are going through—a watch, a faded ID card, a comb, a bit of cloth. Watch an old woman in her black chador, with tattoos on her hands, looking through the plastic bags on top of the

unidentified bodies that have been placed back in the graves for something to help her to find her son. Stand at the mass grave near Kirkuk. Look at the skeletons now tenderly reburied in simple wooden coffins. Talk to Nasir al-Hussein, who was only 12 at the time of the 1991 mass arrests. He, his mother, uncle and cousins were piled on to buses, and then the executions started down a farm road in the middle of the country. People were thrown into a pit, machine-gunned and buried with a bulldozer. Nasir crawled out of the mass grave, leaving his dead relatives behind.

The killing fields of al-Hillah and Kirkuk are unremarkable, but here are some of the hundreds of thousands of the perhaps 1.5 million dead or missing in Iraq. Saddam's victims were the Shi'as, the Kurds and the communists—the people of Iraq. Now the secrets of that evil and despotic regime are being revealed. How much more killing might there have been? My hon. Friends may carry on about weapons of mass destruction, but I think that the action that we took was the right one, and I will always defend it.

3.28 pm

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): I agree with what the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) has said. She has a long and honourable record of reminding us what a dreadful regime that was, and if ever there was a case for regime change on humanitarian grounds, this was surely it. But of course that is not the basis on which the Government went to war.

Interestingly, the United States Government do not have the same problem, because they basically said what the hon. Lady said, "This is an extremely unpleasant individual, who is murdering millions of his own citizens and destabilising the region, and we are not going to put up with it any longer." If the Prime Minister had come here and said that, I would have supported that, but that is not what he said. What he did, at great length, was to construct a legal case for going to war. I do not know whether that is because he felt that that was necessary, or because he felt that it was necessary to carry the majority of Labour MPs with him, but he did it.

That surprises me to some extent because the House was very willing to go to war in Kosovo on the grounds of humanitarian intervention when 30 people had been killed in the so-called Racak massacre. That intervention was clearly illegal by any standards of international law. There was absolutely no justification for it. If there is a doctrine of humanitarian intervention, it would not have extended to that. It certainly would have extended to Iraq, but that is not the case that was made.

I rejoiced in the outcome. I believe that the policy that we and the United States are pursuing will result in great benefits in the region. Progress—albeit modest and slow—has started towards the rule of law and democracy. There have been more elections in the middle east in the past six months than for a very long time outside Israel. All that could, and I hope will, result in a much more stable region and cut off the finance and support for many terrorist movements. However, no one would deny that it is a high-risk policy. It may or may not result in that, but it is worth a try and I hope that it succeeds.

However, the issue is not whether we were right to go to war; the issue is the Government's credibility. So many question marks hang over the evidence presented to Parliament that it has become an issue all of its own. The crucial question is, "Did the Government misuse or misrepresent intelligence information?" There are so many possible indicators that they did that those questions have to be answered. We have tried to get them answered and, to a large extent, failed. They cannot remain unanswered for much longer.

The central allegation about the WMD dossier is that it was manipulated because the 45-minute claim did not justify inclusion. It was not just Andrew Gilligan who made that allegation. We set out in the report a series of newspaper articles that appeared around the same time. Many people within the machine were talking to journalists. Pauline Neville-Jones, a former chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, told us:

"There was clearly turbulence inside the machine".

We are not talking about some concoction got up by one journalist at the BBC.

Those of us who heard Andrew Gilligan could not simply dismiss his evidence. His source was right about two things: first, that the 45-minute allegation was a late entry into the field and, secondly, that it was single sourced. He said that before anyone else and the Government have since confirmed it. He clearly had a source who knew quite a lot about what was going on. Because his evidence could not be dismissed, the Committee had difficulty in reaching a conclusion on the matter, although I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) that it was virtually unanimous on everything else in the report.

I shall highlight one or two things that cast doubt in our mind. We were a bit mystified about what was the first draft of the report. It was presented to us by Mr. Campbell and the Foreign Secretary that the first draft appeared around 9 or 10 September, which we then debated. However, the idea of the dossier had been around since March. The crucial question is what happened between March and 10 September, not what happened between 10 September and publication. What was the role of people at No. 10 during that time? I imagine it was not published in March because it was not interesting enough. The Foreign Secretary dismisses the 45-minute claim and the uranium, but they were the two things that grabbed the headlines. They got the press interested and gave some credibility to the dossier. One of those claims was so late that it did not even go through the Joint Intelligence Committee assessment procedure. The other came in very late in the day.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maples: If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I shall not because Front-Bench spokesmen want to start the winding-up speeches.

We find that Alastair Campbell chaired the meeting at which the draft document was considered in September, even though John Scarlett, who chairs the JIC, was at the meeting. We were told that the document was produced by the JIC, yet its chairman only sits as a member of the committee. Pauline Neville-Jones told us, as did an Australian intelligence agent, that it did not read like a JIC document. It is much more certain than a JIC document. The 1998 document that the Foreign

[Mr. Maples]

Office put out before Desert Fox is full of qualifications—"may be", "could be", "perhaps". Furthermore, if we compare the body of the text on the 45-minute claim and the chemical and biological weapons claims, it contains many more qualifications than the executive summary, which is more certain. We draw attention to that in our report.

The Government's behaviour has been bizarre in several respects, including Alastair Campbell deciding that he would, would not and then would appear before the Committee, and the huge smokescreen that was thrown up. The Government have two ways of dealing with the problem. One is to pretend it does not exist. The other is to throw up huge smokescreens by letting off explosions in adjacent areas to distract attention. Alastair Campbell's performance was impressive, but bizarre. This week, there has been the extraordinary episode with Dr. Kelly. Apparently, the Ministry of Defence knew that he had talked to Mr. Gilligan the week before the Foreign Affairs Committee published its report, so why did it delay identifying him and explaining that it knew who had talked to Gilligan until after we published the report? The cynics say that that was because on the Tuesday there was a vote on foundation hospitals, but I suspect that the real reason is that the MOD did not want us to talk to him. It knew that he was not Mr. Gilligan's source for the 45-minute claim—something that we found out in the first 10 minutes of his time with us. There may be paranoia, but such actions certainly feed it. If people suspect that someone is not telling them the truth, and then that person does all sorts of bizarre things, that tends to reinforce their position.

There are a lot of unanswered questions. The war with the BBC is an extraordinary and exaggerated distraction. The BBC has not accused the Prime Minister of lying—one of its correspondents has said that someone in the Government told him that they were unhappy about the document, which is a fundamentally different thing. The Committee was completely united in its view of the dodgy dossier, which is the most amateurish, irresponsible document that any Government have put out for 100 years or even longer. I am afraid that it has the fingerprints of the Prime Minister's director of communications all over it. It was produced at his request by a unit for which he is responsible. He has tried to lay the blame on a junior Foreign Office official for not including some footnotes, but it is inconceivable that the document would ever have been published if the person responsible for producing it were a senior Foreign Office official. It could only have been produced by an amateur or someone so irresponsible that they could not see that in pursuing the advantage of their political master they were damaging the Government's credibility.

People who do not have any doubts about the dossier on weapons of mass destruction—and I started off without very many—will wonder, once they realise what had happened with the dodgy dossier and the way in which it was produced, how the first one was produced. We know that Mr. Campbell was chairing the meetings on both. In one, apparently, he is a complete amateur and blithering idiot, but in the other he is an objective professional, which begs what the lawyers would call further and better particulars. The Government have undermined their own credibility with the dodgy dossier, which the Foreign Secretary himself described as a load of Horlicks; the way in which Dr. Kelly was used and abused; and the completely artificial row that Alastair Campbell has got up with the BBC, and that is now the issue.

I believed the WMD dossier when it was published because it was common sense, considering what UNSCOM and UNMOVIC found. As a witness told us, it would have been irresponsible to come to any conclusion other than that Iraq had a WMD capability. One has increasing doubts while such weapons are not found but, of course, if they are, that will be the end of the argument, and the Government's case will have been comprehensively proved. However, if they are not found, there are only two conclusions that one can come to—either our intelligence was comprehensively wrong or, alternatively, it was misrepresented by the Government.

The Government's credibility is now at stake. It is in their interests, if they want us to believe them on an issue like this in future, to let Parliament and the public get to the bottom of this. I agree with the Foreign Secretary that a judicial inquiry is an incredibly laborious and unsatisfactory way of doing that, but there is only one alternative. I put it to him that even now, at this late stage, he should let the Foreign Affairs Committee, of which I am a member—*[Interruption.]* No, he should let it see the draft of the document and the JIC reports going back to March, so we can see who said what before the final document was produced. We should also be allowed to interview the witnesses whom we wanted to see. If we could do that, we could get to the bottom of this. It would not take two years but a couple of months, and would be much more satisfactory than the alternative. If the Foreign Secretary will not let us do that, the only alternative is an independent inquiry of some sort.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) *rose—*

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Undoubtedly, the vote on 18 March on going to war was the most controversial thing to have happened in my time in the House, and it led to the biggest rebellion among Labour Members. This afternoon, four Labour Back Benchers have been called, all of whom supported our going to war, while a number of us who voted against the war were not called. The public are entitled to hear both sides of the argument, and this certainly smacks of the management of business by a Government who are in deep trouble.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Lady is criticising the Chair directly, but to do so she must table a substantive motion. I can certainly speak for the way in which these arrangements are made, and I can assure her that every possible consideration is taken into account. The Chair may not be perfect in the eyes of all Members in the arrangements that it makes, but it does try to do so fairly and impartially. If the hon. Lady does not think so, she should table an appropriate motion.

Mr. Tam Dalyell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but on a different aspect of it. I am not

making a personal complaint. I spoke for four minutes in the previous debate. Surely some consideration should be given not to rebellion, but to dissent. My particular point is that some of those who were lucky enough to be called have evaporated from the debate. Hon. Members who are lucky enough to be called in a short debate have some obligation to the rest of the House to remain.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman and I might share a view on the standard of courtesies currently observed in the House. Mr. Speaker has on occasion tried to remind hon. Members of the ways and practices of the House, and that it is customary to stay for debates. However, it is not a matter of order for the Chair. If the hon. Gentleman looked back on the record of contributions made to all the debates that have taken place on or about this subject, he would see that there has been an attempt by the Chair to ensure the widest possible participation.

3.40 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): This is a pretty sad and mucky day for the Government, following a pretty sad and mucky month. Historians will look back with astonishment at the way in which a decision that, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) said, seemed to be brave and courageous, and which was applauded and respected by many, has since deteriorated into a morass of suspicion and recrimination that has seen trust in the Government plummet to unforeseen depths. Perhaps I can say to my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) that the climate of concern that that has engendered cannot be denied or ignored.

In the context of that collapse of trust, the report, as far as it goes, matters. We welcome it, and the Committee's work. My right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) catalogued in great detail the confusion and inconsistency that have become the hallmark of the Government. He spoke of the September dossier, the February dossier, the weapons of mass destruction, the 45-minutes claim, the supposed uranium from Niger, and Dr. David Kelly's witness, but the Foreign Secretary failed to address any of those matters. We did not hear a single word about any detailed aspect of the report. We had 35 minutes of fog and distraction, and he dwelt only on the idea of setting up a judicial inquiry. That is only a part of the motion.

If I accused the right hon. Gentleman of taking 45 minutes to launch an argument, he would no doubt find a way of denying it. His tactic at the end was shameful. Saying that a vote for the motion would be a vote to criticise the intelligence services is the last refuge of the scoundrel. It is a disgrace.

Mr. Straw: I did not say that, as the record will show. I said that the Opposition's motion represented a lack of confidence in the Intelligence and Security Committee. That is true. I also said that the fact that the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) failed to mention the ISC in the motion or in his speech was an insult to members of that Committee from both sides of the House.

Mr. Duncan: The record will show whether the right hon. Gentleman said "services" or "Committee". I thought I heard "services". However, it is not the Committee or the intelligence services that we are criticising. It is perhaps his conduct, and that of Alastair Campbell, the Prime Minister and the Government. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes said, the debate is about the nature of the information that the Government had and the way in which that information was handled.

I say again on the record that we supported the decision to take military action in Iraq. We still think it was right, but we took an enormous amount on trust. The Prime Minister's conduct is now under scrutiny. We have not changed, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire implies. The Prime Minister must be judged by the terms of his arguments and reasoning, and he must be judged against the arguments that he put and the methods that he adopted. That is why the anger is most heated on the Government Benches. Many there feel that the Prime Minister has engaged in chicanery in order to win them round. As the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) implied in her point of order, it was his own side that had to be persuaded.

I cannot rehearse all the arguments, but let me take one—the subsequent approach to weapons of mass destruction, which follows from the main argument that was put to justify going into Iraq in the first place. It appears from everything that the Government have done that they hoped that after the successful so-called liberation of Iraq, the question of weapons of mass destruction would go away. It was "so-called" in terms of the obvious jubilation and total agreement within Iraq that was predicted by many who went in—which I have to say that the Opposition questioned at the very beginning. The Prime Minister always said, "Oh, we'll definitely find them." In *The Spectator*, the Secretary of State for Defence said of WMD:

> "Well, that was the reason we gave, which I stand by, for taking military action against Saddam . . . We're confident that weapons of mass destruction are there. We now have to find them."

Yet, within a few days, the newly appointed Secretary of State for International Development said that they were not a high priority. Of course, the Government are now saying that all that they need to show is that there were some kind of plans or programmes.

I think that the Committee has done its work very well. Clearly, its work has not finished, and some of the questioning has been very tough and will remain so. We have had a productive debate this afternoon. The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) put his finger on the main question of whether the UK went to war on a flawed prospectus, and whether that prospectus was mishandled by the process of government at the highest level. It is that process that is now under investigation, and we welcome the Liberal Democrats' decision to join us in the Lobby tonight.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) again questioned the 45-minute claim, and my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire spoke very thoughtfully about the coalition between the left-of-centre Prime Minister—or perhaps I should say the so-called left-of-centre Prime Minister—and a right-of-centre President.

[Mr. Duncan]

In the speech that we heard at the very end of the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) put his finger on the central issue. What is now of great concern to everybody is that this matter has gone to the heart of the credibility of the Government in so many areas. We took the Prime Minister on trust. Maybe we were ill advised to do so, and our eyes should have been wider open.

It is not as if we have not voiced our concerns in the past. Perhaps I may even, in a rare moment of self-indulgence, refer to a little-known pamphlet—guess who wrote it. It was published on the day that John Major announced the date of the 1997 election, so it is unique in being the most ignored and overshadowed document in British political history. Do not the Government just wish that their own dossiers were the same?

The pamphlet states:

"The evidence is that young people are already beginning to see through the slick imagery of Tony Blair. A recent opinion poll commissioned for . . . a . . . satellite youth channel, found that 56% of 18–25 year-olds regard Blair as 'untrustworthy'. They can sense that there is something not quite right about him."

Allow me a little more self-indulgence:

"What are his dominant qualities? The first is a seemingly insatiable vanity, touching on vainglory."—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but there is far too much sedentary comment. He should be allowed to make his speech, and we will then hear a reply from the Minister.

Mr. Duncan: Labour Members do not like hearing what I am saying. There is nothing dodgy about this:

"The second is a simplistic evangelism of the sort that believes that wanting a better world constitutes a serious policy. The third is a ruthlessness which is deployed only for power but never for principle. This is a potent cocktail for tragedy."

Mr. Straw: As the hon. Gentleman has accepted that he launched his pamphlet on the day when John Major announced the date of the 1997 general election, will he remind us what effect it had on the result of that election?

Mr. Duncan: Sadly, it had no effect, for the reasons that I have explained, but it had another useful paragraph. It said that the Prime Minister's

"first act would be to appoint a political No. 10 press secretary in order to blur the conventional distinction between official government activity and party political matters."

It also said that he would

"extend the system of surrounding senior ministers with political appointees whose prime purpose would be to override the impartiality of civil servants."

All that I missed out of that wonderful document was the fact that Alastair Campbell would appoint himself effective head of the Joint Intelligence Committee.

That was a fitting prelude to the conclusions of the report. The ingredients of the tragedy that is unfolding have always been there. We have had the smiles to camera, the slogans, the negative politics, the crafting and the spin. I could live with that—as my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire urged—if it had stopped there, but the trouble with riding so high for so long on the back of those techniques is that the Prime Minister now finds it difficult to distinguish truth from falsity. That is what brings politics into disrepute; we would be fools to pretend otherwise. The effect of this sad episode is that the Prime Minister's credibility is crumbling. His party, rather like Baghdad, is teetering between order and security. The evident decency of most Labour Members has been sorely affronted, prompting two Cabinet resignations and no end of disquiet on the Prime Minister's side of the House. Instead of getting an honest account, we receive groundless rebuttals and a cheesy grin of deceit.

The question of trust is important enough even on the battleground of our own domestic politics, but as the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife said, it is of far graver significance in the context of potential global events. Institutions are under strain, and concepts and doctrines of military action are in turmoil. The crucial moral foundation needed by any country that might choose to exercise military authority over another is the decency of its own conduct and actions. Perhaps the Foreign Secretary would accept, as a principle for his future actions, that if a country is not trusted by its own people, it will not be trusted in the context of wider global events.

I urge Labour Members to consider what might happen in the event of a decision to take action against North Korea or Iran in relation to the nuclear programmes that we all believe that they are trying to build up. Given the Government's conduct in this case, and in the absence of any resolution of the concerns that have subsequently arisen, what credibility would they, or any coalition, have? Where would the world end up if a cloud of suspicion were to hang over such judgments in future?

We can address that problem now, and we can address it conclusively. I urge the House to vote for the motion and to take steps towards rebuilding the trust that befits this country, but which has been inexcusably sullied by the Prime Minister.

3.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): We have had a constructive and serious debate, and I am pleased that so many Members were able to contribute.

Let me start with the nub of the motion in the name of the Leader of the Opposition—that because of concerns raised over some elements of the intelligence material, there are doubts about the integrity of the Government's decision to take this country to war, and that there should therefore be an independent judicial inquiry. Yet the Foreign Affairs Committee, in a report and conclusions that every Member welcomed, specifically said: first, that Ministers did not mislead Parliament; secondly, that the claims made in the September dossier were in all probability well founded; thirdly, that the threat posed to UK forces was genuinely perceived as a real and present danger; and fourthly—and importantly, given that it is the Committee's response to the key accusation that has been running for weeks—that Alastair Campbell did not play any role in the inclusion of the 45-minute claim in the September dossier.

The Foreign Affairs Committee, after receiving much evidence and following exhaustive examination and deliberation, effectively rebutted the key allegations and arguments that have been presented today.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Its report also stated:

"We conclude that it is too soon to tell whether the Government's assertions on Iraq's chemical and biological weapons will be borne out."

Mr. Rammell: I am confident that the information the Government received and the judgment they made were correct.

Various hon. Members have commented on the allegations. In opening the debate, the shadow Foreign Secretary referred to the February dossier. I was interested to note that he said that the substance was not wrong but that the process for drawing up the dossier was flawed. The Government have accepted that the way in which it was drawn up was not perfect. However, not one word has been proven inaccurate. The right hon. Gentleman did not challenge the accuracy or the facts in the dossier.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Mr. Rammell: No, I want to make progress.

I was interested in the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), who expressed his anxiety about the lack of independence of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Intelligence and Security Committee. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), who supported the Government in the vote on going to war, voted against the Government at least once during the deliberations of the Foreign Affairs Committee. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps I do my hon. Friend an injustice; he voted against the Government more than once. However, my point is that the Select Committee process is independent, robust and capable of getting at the issues.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I am not happy about the term, "voted against the Government". If that is the criterion, I provided the majority that insisted on Alastair Campbell coming back. Some of my colleagues did not believe that he should.

Mr. Rammell: I stand corrected on the terminology.

Paul Flynn: Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Mr. Rammell: No.

The actions of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock nevertheless demonstrate that the process is robust and independent. I stress that point to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), the Liberal Democrat spokesman, who claimed that the Intelligence and Security Committee process is flawed because the Government will vet its report. I refer him again to the comments of Lord King, a former Conservative Cabinet Minister, who said that the reports cannot be censored and that the Government cannot delete anything simply because it is embarrassing for them.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Does not the Under-Secretary understand that we must satisfy not ourselves but public opinion? If the Government have nothing to fear, why not have an inquiry that is answerable to the public?

Mr. Rammell: As the Foreign Secretary made clear, an independent judicial inquiry would take such a long time that the questions would not be tackled and answered.

The contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, was interesting. He had a fascinating exchange with the shadow Foreign Secretary. Given the comments of Conservative Front-Bench Members, he rightly asked whether the Conservative party would in future take the stance that the Foreign Affairs Committee should have full access to intelligence information and witnesses. The question was greeted with resounding silence from the shadow Foreign Secretary.

Donald Anderson: I was trying to make a simple point: if shadow Front-Bench Members criticise the Government for not doing something that they themselves refuse to do, that is pure opportunism.

Mr. Rammell: Absolutely. I too was trying to make that point, albeit less eloquently than the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Paul Flynn: Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Mr. Rammell: No, I shall make progress.

My hon. Friends the Members for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) and for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) made significant contributions. However, the most impressive and courageous speech was that of the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack). With extraordinary prescience and courage, he pointed out, to put it at its politest, the official Opposition's errors. He rightly argued that, through their actions and tactics, the Conservatives were undermining their credibility by nit-picking—I use his phrase—over matters that do not affect the material issue. It is worth pointing out that he ended his contribution by saying that he was ashamed of his party for making the accusations that it is making today. That took courage, and the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Rammell: I will make some progress, if I may.

Two important claims that have been made against the Government are that in key respects, the intelligence material presented in the September dossier, and, by implication, the basis on which we went to war, were false. On behalf of the Government, I flatly reject that

[Mr. Rammell]

allegation. The 45-minute claim came from an established, reliable and long-standing source that the intelligence services judged to be credible.

Paul Flynn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it be appropriate for you to remind the Minister that, according to the courtesy of the House, when a Member is mentioned in a Minister's speech, it is usual to give way to that Member?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair. Whether an hon. Member gives way is ultimately a matter for the Member in question.

Mr. Rammell: Because of the shortage of time, I want to try to make some progress.

I flatly reject the allegation about the 45-minute claim.

Secondly, many hon. Members have referred to the issue of the yellow cake from Niger. We have consistently made it clear that, notwithstanding the information from the International Atomic Energy Agency, other information was available to us. The importance of this and the other accusation has been blown completely out of proportion, in relation to their relevance and importance in the debate that took place in the run-up to the passing of the resolution that committed our troops to action in March.

Mr. Randall: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Rammell: No, I want to make some progress.

The key issue that was consistently put forward at that time did not relate to this or that piece of intelligence information. The fundamental issue, then and now, is Saddam Hussein's failure to comply with UN Security Council resolution 1441. It was on the basis of that resolution, which was not based on specific intelligence materials, that we took the decision to commit ourselves to military action.

It is also worth recalling the comments of the Leader of the Opposition on 18 March, when that key vote took place. He took an absolutely justified position. He did not say that he was supporting the Government because of what they had told him about 45 minutes or about yellow cake; he rightly said that he was doing so because, after 12 years of non-compliance, resolution 1441 had given Saddam a final opportunity to comply and he had not taken it. That is why the Leader of the Opposition supported the Government in committing to war. If he has now changed his mind on that fundamental issue, he is entitled to do so, but I think that the House is entitled to know the reasons why the Conservative Opposition have changed their position.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman keeps making that point, but did he not hear me making it absolutely clear when I opened this debate that we backed the Prime Minister on 18 March because we believed that he was acting in the national interest? That remains our position, and the Minister should stop making these accusations.

Mr. Rammell: With respect, the right hon. Gentleman has heard very clearly today from one of his own hon. Friends why that argument has no credibility whatever, because of the nit-picking and the Conservative party's attempt to play politics with this issue.

I want to deal briefly with the issue of the independent inquiry, which forms a key part of the motion tabled by the Conservative Opposition. If we were to go down that route, it would take at least two years—judging by previous experience—for such an inquiry to reach a conclusion. Is that really the mechanism that we want to use to get to the bottom of these issues? I do not believe that that is what the House wants.

Mr. Randall: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Rammell: No, I want to make some progress.

Let us consider the detail of the Opposition motion. They claim first that the Foreign Affairs Committee had insufficient time to complete its task. That was a matter for the Committee; it chose the time scale and the deadline. If the Conservative Opposition have a problem with that, they should refer it to the Select Committee.

Secondly, the Opposition claim that there are concerns about intelligence material. I believe that I have dealt with those concerns, and made it clear that we committed ourselves to the war not because of individual pieces of intelligence but because Saddam had failed to comply with resolution 1441. Nevertheless, there will be a robust and independent inquiry by the Intelligence and Security Committee, which will be able to get to the bottom of those issues.

Thirdly, the Opposition claim that we need an independent inquiry. As I have said, it would take two years to complete such an inquiry. The ISC could do the same job in an eighth of the time.

I do not consider the motion credible. It is not worthy of the official Opposition, and certainly not worthy of an Opposition who claim to aspire to government. I urge my colleagues to support the Government amendment and oppose the motion.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 200, Noes 299.

Division No. 294] **[4:05 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cohen, Harry
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Corbyn, Jeremy

Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McDonnell, John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Opik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Watkinson and Mr. Mark Field

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet

Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Gillian Merron and
Mr. Fraser Kemp

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Ninth Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee on the Decision to go to War in Iraq, Session 2002–03, HC 813; notes that substantial oral and written evidence, by and on behalf of the Government, was provided to the Committee; believes that the Intelligence and Security Committee, established by Parliament by statute, is the appropriate body to consider the intelligence relating to Iraq; and notes that this Committee has already begun its inquiry.

Vulnerable Children

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I must advise the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.18 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I beg to move,

That this House notes that it is now almost six months since the publication of Lord Laming's report on the Victoria Climbié Inquiry and well over three years since the death of this little girl; further notes that, of the 108 recommendations by Lord Laming, 82 were recommended to be acted upon within six months; condemns the Government for its continued failure to produce the long-awaited Green Paper on Children at Risk, which was originally promised in the spring as the Government's response to many of the systemic failures in child protection highlighted by Lord Laming; is concerned at the continued failure of the Government to address the crisis in recruitment of social worker professionals skilled in child protection who are essential to addressing these failures; regrets that local authorities are unable to implement changes recommended in the Report which would improve the delivery of children's services, because of the delay in the publication of the Government's response; welcomes the creation of the post of a Minister for Children, after six years in government; and calls on the Government to publish the Green Paper immediately as planned in order to secure the confidence and support of all those involved in the protection of vulnerable children.

This debate should not be happening today. On the penultimate day that the House sits before the summer recess, it has taken an Opposition day debate to force the Government to address the issues of child abuse and safeguarding vulnerable children that were highlighted so graphically and alarmingly by Lord Laming's report into the death of Victoria Climbié. The report was published almost six months ago, and the number of hon. Members remaining in the Chamber shows what a pent-up demand there is for this debate.

Since 28 January, no Minister has made a further statement to the House and we have been constantly fobbed off with the excuse, "It's all in the Green Paper, just wait a little longer". We are still waiting. Only this month, we were told that we and, more important, vulnerable children will have to wait even longer, at least until the other side of the summer recess, despite the Government's previous undertakings, on a matter of the utmost urgency and relevance for all hon. Members.

The events and circumstances surrounding the tragic death of Victoria Climbié, set out in Lord Laming's excellent, comprehensive but deeply worrying report, cannot have failed to move everyone in the House and beyond. It is the most harrowing case that I have ever experienced in my six years as a Member. An eight-year-old child was brought to the United Kingdom from the Ivory Coast, supposedly in search of a better life, in the care of a distant relative, only to die 10 months later with 128 injuries, including cigarette burns, weals from beatings with bicycle chains, belts and coat hangers, and hammer blows to her feet. She weighed only 3 stone 10 lbs, with severe muscle wasting and lung, heart and kidney failure after months of systematic abuse. As Lord Laming said, she was

"the victim of almost unimaginable cruelty".

Thankfully, the perpetrators of that horrific crime, Marie Therese Kouao and Carl Manning, are currently serving long jail sentences. More worryingly, the serious systemic failures that let down Victoria Climbié have still largely to be addressed.

In a report of 405 pages with 108 recommendations, in an inquiry that took 279 witness statements and sifted through 4,000 documents, Herbert Laming insisted that changes to the system were urgently required. He identified 46 recommendations that could be implemented within three months and 36 that could and should be implemented within six months. The rest could be implemented within two years. Those recommendations, as he put it,

"cannot be deferred to some bright tomorrow".

He made the grave finding:

"Not one of the agencies empowered by Parliament to protect children in positions similar to Victoria's—funded from the public purse—emerge from this inquiry with much credit. The suffering and death of Victoria was a gross failure of the system and was inexcusable . . . bad practice can be expensive."

Haringey police admitted:

"In the A-Z of an investigation, that investigation did not even get to B."

The then Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) assured us:

"If some good is to come out of this tragedy, lasting change must come out of it too."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2003; Vol. 398, c. 741.]

The Opposition have offered unqualified support to address a situation that brings shame on our society, with whatever measures are needed, and quickly, and have expressed a determination that this report—the latest of 30 reports on the deaths of children known to social services in as many years—should be different.

Despite all that, since 28 January, no Minister has come to the House to report on the progress of the measures being taken in the wake of Lord Laming's report. No Government time has been allocated to debate child protection measures in the Chamber. The Green Paper on children at risk, promised much earlier in the spring as the Government's formal response to the Laming inquiry, and almost "sexed up" as the universal panacea for everything that is wrong in the whole issue of child protection, has still not appeared. It has been shunted off until some unspecified date in the autumn at the earliest.

The tragedy is that the events surrounding Victoria Climbié's death were not isolated. There have been numerous other high-profile cases of children dying at the hands of parents or carers: for example, the case of six-year-old Lauren Wright from Norfolk; the case of two-year-old Ainlee Walker from Newham; and the case in my own constituency of four-year-old John Smith, who died on Christmas eve 1999 with 54 bruises, bite marks and burns that he suffered at the hands of his foster carers. We know that, on average, 80 children, mostly under the age of one, die in such circumstances every year, and that most of the perpetrators go unpunished.

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children survey of 366 such cases found that in 225 no further action was taken against the suspected perpetrators, and 99 convictions were secured, but few

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of them were for the charge of murder—they were mostly for the lesser charge of cruelty. The indictment rate for such people has been falling drastically.

As hon. Members know, there is a particular problem with the legal loophole of proving joint enterprise that still needs to be resolved despite the efforts of hon. Members on both sides of the House to amend Home Office Bills to that effect.

It is not only the extreme cases that end in death about which we need to be concerned. Many more problems associated with vulnerable children urgently need action from the Government. For example, a quarter of all rape victims in the United Kingdom are children and those are just the ones that we know about. Despite the good work that is being done as a result of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, which we all supported, there are still about 55,000 looked-after children and 30,000 children are on the child protection register, with 600 being added every week. Those children are 50 times more likely than the average child to end up in prison, 60 times more likely to become homeless and 88 times more likely to be involved in drug abuse.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): The hon. Gentleman acknowledged the Adoption and Children Act. Will he also acknowledge the fact that the Adoption Forum has decided to wind up because the Government have fulfilled its agenda, including the passage of that Act and the creation of the post of Minister for Children?

Tim Loughton: Indeed. I pay tribute to the excellent work that members of that forum did. It is regrettable in many ways that it has been wound up, but it is a sign that much work has been done and I pay tribute to the progress that has been made as a result of the 2002 Act on which we both spent many hours, days and weeks—in fact, more than a year.

It is also estimated that three out of every five children who suffer abuse have mothers who experience domestic violence from their partners, that 19 in every 10,000 children under the age of 18 are receiving support services from local authorities—in inner London, that figure rises to as many as 43 in every 10,000—and one in 10 have mental health problems. It is estimated that about 450,000 children are the victims of bullying at school. We have recently seen too many examples of children being driven to suicide as a result of those and other pressures. Furthermore, 130,000 children call ChildLine every year.

We also have a crisis with the children and family court system. A recent report revealed that children at risk of abuse are waiting up to 15 weeks in some parts of the country for court hearings on their future because of a shortage of guardians to represent them after the Government's bungled reorganisation resulted in the loss of many skilled professionals in that area of child protection.

In London, where about 190 children are waiting for hearings to decide whether they should be taken into care, vulnerable children often remain with the people who pose a threat to them because the system is overloaded and taking too long at a crucial and sensitive time. As the Minister recently revealed in a written answer, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service is dealing with about 12,245 public law cases concerned with care, adoption and guardianship.

There are also serious concerns about the number of children who are held in prison, which has doubled from 1,328 in 1992 to 2,609 last year. The provisions of child welfare considerations under the Children Act 1989 do not extend a duty to prison authorities.

There are concerns about the continuation of private fostering despite the strong recommendations of the Utting report, echoed by Lord Laming, which affects more than 10,000 children, primarily from west Africa whence Victoria Climbié came. There are concerns about the continued delay in the national service framework for children, which now seems to have been put back well into 2004.

All in all, the health and welfare of our children does not appear to have been a priority under this Government and the delay in the Green Paper, which is intended as a discussion document and not firm Government proposals, can only add to that impression. As the all-party parliamentary group on children put it in its annual review,

> "In general children are, and have been ignored in the area of health policy. But children should be a focus because nothing matters more to families than the health, welfare and future success of their children."

As Lucy Thorpe, policy director of the NSPCC put it,

> "Children are ¼ of the population and for too long their health needs, from a child-centred perspective, have come a poor second to those of adults."

What the Government have been good at, however, is coming up with new schemes, bodies and titles, supposedly to deal with child welfare: the children and young people's unit, area child protection committees, sure start, home start, children's fund, children's trusts, children's centres, the neighbourhood support fund, the parenting fund, Connexions, quality protects, the neighbourhood nurseries initiative, children's strategic partnership bodies, the national service framework for children—or lack of it—CAFCASS, the children's tsar, and so on. I am sure that each of those has merits, but taken together, they represent a bombardment of local initiatives from central Government. They are not joined up, often work in silos and, as Lord Laming has said, often poach staff from one another.

Conversely, what the Government are particularly bad at producing is the increase in the number of social workers skilled in child protection who can carry out those initiatives and look out for children on the ground. The Government always claim that they have no central information on recruitment or retention rates. According to Library figures, the social worker vacancy rate is well above 10 per cent. and much higher for child social workers, and things are much worse in London and the south-east.

Many experienced professionals are demoralised and leaving the profession. The figures conceal the real problems of a heavy reliance on agency staff and a big turnover in staff. A Unison survey revealed that 60 per cent. of departments said that, even if all the vacant posts were filled, there would still not be enough social workers to manage the current case loads—and those case loads will increase, with the extra duties being

placed on local authorities, for example, with responsibilities under the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and so on.

Clearly, there are many problems with the welfare of children that the Government urgently need to address, and we might have expected them to be addressed urgently after the then Secretary of State's encouraging response to the Laming report.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): My hon. Friend mentions social worker vacancies. Does he agree that it behoves all of us, particularly the press, to act with great responsibility when social workers are brought into the limelight for having done something wrong? Although we would all want such matters to be fully and properly investigated, we must bear in mind the effect on those thinking of joining the profession if the downside seems huge and the upside is ignored.

Tim Loughton: I could not agree more. No one is interested in reading the story about the plane that landed safely. The press only like to come up with the bad news stories that pillory social workers, who are given a bad reputation. The vast majority of them do a very good job in increasingly difficult circumstances, and we all have a duty to improve the image. There has been too much finger-pointing, which is most unhelpful.

There are many questions still to be answered. In his response to the Laming report, my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) posed a series of practical questions to clarify the Government's intentions. He asked how the House could monitor progress on the Laming report in a truly transparent way. How will communications improve in practice, beyond just setting up new structures? What role is envisaged for the greater use of information sharing in early detection? What review of the Data Protection Act 1998 will the Government undertake to ensure that nothing stands in the way proper information sharing? To what extent does the Secretary of State believe that the current classification of children in need of protection militates against appropriate protection? What changes will be made? What has the Secretary of State learned from the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, which places a positive duty of care on parents to promote children's well-being? Should sections 27 and 47 of the Children Act 1989 be amended to include the police and general practitioners as agencies that should support local authorities in carrying out their duties in relation to children in need of protection?

Many other hon. Members have asked questions as well about the future of children's trusts and whether the Secretary of State agrees that all the agencies involved in area child protection committees should have a statutory duty to take part in them. In answer to all those points and more, which the Secretary of State welcomed, he pointed to the forthcoming Green Paper to provide the comprehensive answers. I say again that we are still waiting, so I and other hon. Members have been tabling a number of questions to elicit answers from the Government.

For example, earlier in the year, I asked the Secretary of State

"how many recommendations by Lord Laming in his report on Victoria Climbié shown as achievable within three months have been initiated; which have not".

The response from the Minister, who is present today in a new role as the Minister for Industry and the Regions, was:

"There are 46 recommendations in the Victoria Climbié Inquiry which are . . . achievable within three months . . . the checklist of good practice recommendations sent to police, health and social services . . . were also included in the self-audit tools which were issued subsequently by the Commission for Health Improvement and the Social Services Inspectorate. The remaining . . . recommendations will be covered in our substantive response to the report, to be published shortly as part of the Green Paper on Children at Risk."—[*Official Report*, 3 June 2003; Vol. 406, c. 65–66W.]

Sending out a checklist is not the same as acting on the recommendations and being able to see how the system has changed as a result. What auditing mechanism is in place to make sure that local authorities have acted on the good practice recommendations? Will compliance, for example, be a component of social services star ratings in future?

Earlier in the year, I asked which area child protection committees are complying with the guidance from the Laming report. I received the answer:

"The information requested is not held centrally."—[*Official Report*, 10 March 2003; Vol. 401, c. 96W.]

I asked which recommendations the Government intended to implement. The Government's answer was:

"we will make our substantive response to the report as part of the Green Paper on Children at Risk, which will be published in the spring."—[*Official Report*, 3 March 2003; Vol. 400, c. 882W.]

We do not therefore know how much of the Laming report the Government agree with and want to implement. Which recommendations do they not intend to adopt?

I asked:

"what communications to GPs regarding procedures for dealing with children suspected of suffering harm at the hands of their carers have been issued"?

I received the answer:

"There were no communications directly to general practitioners regarding procedures for dealing with children suspected of suffering harm at the hands of their carers".—[*Official Report*, 27 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 701W.]

I asked,

"what discussions he has had with social services authorities in Nigeria, Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast about the dangers to children coming to the UK to live without their parents."—[*Official Report*, 25 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 516W.]

The answer was, "None". One might have expected the Government to address the source of the problem in Victoria Climbié's case—not least because of the high incidence of child trafficking from that part of the world and private fostering involving children from west Africa—either through dealing with international social services or directly with those Governments. The answer, however, is that nothing has happened.

[Tim Loughton]

I asked the Minister,

"what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the confidentiality considerations contained in the Data Protection Act . . . and the sharing of information about vulnerable children between agencies recommended by Lord Laming."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring mentioned, that was a key consideration. Surprise, surprise, the answer was that the Government

"will publish a full response to the report in the spring."—[*Official Report*, 24 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 31W.]

I therefore asked what estimate the Secretary of State had made of

"the cost of the implementation of recommendations in the Laming report for each local authority".

We were told:

"This good practice . . . is covered within the budgets already allocated"—

but, surprise, surprise—

"The response to the Inquiry, covering all the other recommendations, will be made as part of the Green Paper on Children at Risk."—[*Official Report*, 3 June 2003; Vol. 405, c. 368W.]

Never in the history of Parliament, it would appear, has so much been promised in a single Green Paper.

Local authorities are in limbo as to what resources to use for the Laming recommendations, let alone which will take priority, and we all know that without the resources and the professional staff, the Laming report will not be implemented in anything like the comprehensive way that is necessary if it is to make a real difference.

Clive Efford (Eltham): Those of us who were on social services committees during the last Conservative Government will not recognise anything that the hon. Gentleman is saying. As a member of a social services committee that went through the Kimberley Carlisle inquiry, I know that the Government did not fund a single recommendation that came out of it. Local authorities were forced to fund that from their existing budgets. For his information, the local authority was also forced to pay for the entire inquiry out of that budget.

Tim Loughton: Labour Members may like to play the usual game of saying that it is all the fault of the Conservative party.

Clive Efford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tim Loughton: Let me give an answer first. In the 1990s, we had nothing like the same haemorrhaging of professional, skilled social workers—the people with the experience of dealing with these cases day in, day out—demoralised by having too many agency workers filling places and having extra responsibilities placed on them without the extra resources to go with it. We do not therefore need to take any lessons from the Labour party.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Tim Loughton: I will give way in a minute, if I can make a little more progress.

In many respects, therefore, an awful lot is riding on this Green Paper. Its non-appearance is not simply an unfortunate oversight in parliamentary procedure—something for political debate, relevant only to the confines and niceties of this Chamber—but is having seriously detrimental effects on professionals involved in child protection, and, inevitably, on the welfare of children themselves. The lack of progress is causing chaos for other Bills as well, with Bill teams increasingly saying that legislation depends on issues still to be raised in the Green Paper.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that measures such as my Protection of Children Act 1999 show that there has been a constructive approach from all parts of the House on child protection? I especially pay tribute to Opposition Members for their work on my Act. Will he outline his party's opinion on the Laming report and tell us how it would contribute constructively to the report's recommendations?

Tim Loughton: Gladly. We published a response on 28 January. My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring outlined a series of criteria that we want and on which we largely agree with Lord Laming. We also held a summit on child health and protection issues at Westminster on the day that the Laming report came out, which brought together a whole host of professionals. We have made many suggestions on how we should move forward from the report. We have been waiting for the Green Paper so that we may make our suggestions formally in response to the Government's consultation.

Let us listen to what other people have said about the problems caused by the lack of progress. The Local Government Association said:

"The Local Government Association . . . is disappointed and frustrated at the further delay to the Green Paper on Children at Risk. Five months after Lord Laming's report into Victoria Climbie's tragic death, progress should have been made on introducing measures to address the failings that Laming identified. Councils should not still be waiting for the government to give an indication of the changes to be proposed. Too many councils are in limbo, ambitious about improving their services in line with Laming's recommendations but afraid to implement changes without knowing what is around the corner."

Voluntary bodies such as the NSPCC have voiced their frustration at being constantly fobbed off about the timing of the Green Paper. Doctors need clear guidance and training. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health said:

"Implementing Laming advice will mean a lot of extra work. We will need perhaps 30 trainers across the country to roll out the programme to . . . 6000 college members in the UK".

On the point about information sharing, it says:

"All reports into child abuse say it is essential to share information—with other doctors, with social services, with the police. But the laws on confidentiality state that we must not share this information"—

although that is a crucial point that Laming identified. Doctors point out that we need a rational system for classifying abuse cases because, as their representatives say:

"At the moment child protection is seen as black or white. Either there is a child protection issue or there is not."

Many questions and problems need urgently to be addressed. There is a lot riding on this illusory Green Paper and there is no excuse for further delay. Victoria Climbié was murdered three and a half years ago. The trial of her killers ended two and half years ago. The proceedings of Lord Laming's inquiry opened more than two years ago. Numerous studies on child protection have been commissioned, such as the "Safeguarding Children" report that was published last autumn and dealt with arrangements for area child protection committees.

On 30 October 2002, the Prime Minister promised that a Green Paper would be published early in 2003 on the whole issue of children at risk and that the problem would be dealt with across the whole of government. However, there has been great confusion about which Department has taken ownership of the Green Paper and the Departments that have inputted information; I gather that it has largely been under the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. On 28 January, the former Secretary of State for Health said:

"We will make our substantive response to the report as part of the Green Paper on children at risk which we intend to publish this spring."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2003; Vol. 398, c. 737.]

The spring has come and gone. Secretaries of State have come and gone. A new Minister for Children has come. We welcome the creation of the post of Minister for Children if it will genuinely join up Government policy on children across Departments. We have long called for that as an alternative to the situation under the previous nominal Minister with responsibility for children, the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham). He was also the Home Office Minister with responsibility for prisons, so that sent out all the wrong signals about the way in which the Government deal with children.

The hon. Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge) made a terrible start as the first holder of the important, sensitive and much-trumpeted post of Minister for Children. She has spent her first four weeks on the defensive for her track record as the leader of Islington council when she presided over one of the worst cases of systematic child sexual abuse and neglect in a local authority, despite the strong warnings that she was personally given by senior social workers.

Yet perhaps we should not be surprised when we see that senior officers in other Labour-run London councils, who all had responsibility for departments that should have looked after Victoria Climbié, went on to greater things. One became the head of the Commission for Racial Equality; one was head-hunted by Hackney council; one council leader went to the Lords and is a member of the Greater London Authority. If we add to that the track record of the hon. Member for Barking for putting the considerations of political correctness before the common-sense welfare of children, personally launching a booklet about banning skipping ropes, musical chairs and GCSE grades below C, we have to ask whether this important appointment is not already fatally flawed and one of the biggest let-downs of the botched reshuffle.

Although the creation of the role was widely welcomed by all sorts of organisations involved with children and by us, the hon. Lady's appointment was greeted with deafening silence. Rather than spending her first month defending her record, claiming that her mistakes make her ideally placed for this new role and trying to sell us the line that the Green Paper will again be delayed because the Prime Minister wants to be personally involved in its launch, which she says is an unparalleled commitment—it is not, because he took ownership of the review on adoption, for example—she should be answering questions about what her new Department will cover.

Will the new Department or the Department of Health be responsible for children and adolescent mental health services? Will the hon. Lady be responsible for the even more delayed national service framework for children? When will we get serious and comprehensive solutions to the issues raised by Lord Laming? When will responsibility for child protection be properly joined up at local level, and which individual will ultimately take responsibility for drawing all the relevant agencies together locally? Where, and when, will the buck stop? When will we have properly informed assessments of need for individual children, properly monitored, resourced and implemented? When does the hon. Lady expect to have established a framework for children at risk which is all about outcomes, not structures, and which is child-centred, not concentrated on the adult agenda?

Those are the issues that need addressing urgently. Instead, it would appear that the hon. Lady's sole achievement today is an undertaking that she will not in fact be the Minister for Children but the Minister for Children, Young People and Families. We fear that the Green Paper will be further delayed by the new Minister being sidelined and sidetracked by having to defend herself, now that the truth is coming out about her failure to protect vulnerable children in Islington.

The Laming report must be different. It must herald a radical shake-up of the system. As the former Secretary of State for Health promised:

"In future services for children must be centred not around the interests of any organisation, but around the interests of the child. Nothing—no existing organisation, no existing structure—should be allowed to stand in the way."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2003; Vol. 398, c. 741.]

We agree wholeheartedly with that now, as we did then. But changing ministerial titles, giving feeble excuses for delay about prime ministerial interests and issuing checklists about how many interdepartmental committees need to meet do not save children at risk and are now standing in the way of protecting those children.

The real test for any new structures must be measured not by how many bulletins and meetings are generated, but by how many children are saved from cruelty and abuse. The Green Paper has been promised as a crucial element in that process, and must be produced and promoted without further delay. To repeat Lord Laming, the

"recommendations cannot be deferred to some bright tomorrow."

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have now to announce the result of the Divisions deferred from a previous day.

On the motion on Immigration, the Ayes were 376, the Noes were 52, so the motion was agreed to.

On the motion on Social Security, the Ayes were 270, the Noes were 52, so the motion was agreed to.

[The Division Lists are published at the end of today's debates.]

4.49 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the Government's commitment to children's services as evidenced by the appointment of the Minister of State for Children; congratulates the Government on its Quality Protects initiative, which provided £885 million to improve children's social services; supports the action the Government is taking to legislate to establish an independent inspectorate to inspect local authority children's services and social care provided by the private and voluntary sector; notes that the Government, local authorities and other statutory bodies are already taking further action to improve services for children, in the light of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report; congratulates the Government and local services on the announcement of the 35 Children's Trusts Pathfinders on 10th July; and looks forward to the publication of the Green Paper on children in the autumn."

We welcome the debate. I shall begin by addressing aspects of common ground before exploring points of difference. We all welcome Lord Laming's report and its recommendations. We also all regret that the time scale is so long, although the reasons for that are understandable. Victoria Climbié tragically died on 25 February 2000. Two individuals were convicted of her murder on 12 January 2001; Lord Laming's inquiry was established on 20 April 2001; the evidence was finished on 31 July 2002; and the inquiry reported on 28 January 2003. The period is too long. I agree with the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) that that is a matter of concern which we need to address.

The truth is that we have a long history of sad inquiries. Since about 1980, there have been more than 50 inquiries into child deaths and child abuse, of which five, including the Laming inquiry, were statutory inquiries. The others were serious case reviews of high-profile cases, including some in my county. As an aside, I pay tribute to Conservative Secretaries of State during that time who tried to address those matters in a principled way. That is how we should address politicians who tackle such problems; we should not cast slurs.

Equally, there have been inquiry reports—17 in the same period—into the abuse of children in residential care. We all know that there is too long a history of a children's social services profession that has been blown about by difficult sequences of appalling tragedies and their consequent inquiries. Sometimes the profession has been accused of intervening too much, and at other times of intervening too little. It has been difficult to get stability in those circumstances. I agree with the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) that getting a sense of proportion and balance is extremely difficult but also extremely important. So another aspect of common ground is the need for stability and confidence in the profession so that people can proceed with their professional duties in a positive and strong way that deals with the interests of the child.

The third element of common ground, on which the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham concluded, is linked to the second. The child's welfare must be at the centre of everything that we do. We are not interested in the welfare of particular professions, institutions or whatever.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): The Secretary of State rightly starts by referring to social services, and many earlier reports concentrated on that agency. A key aspect of the Victoria Climbié report, however, is that the recommendations cover not just social services, but a raft of other agencies—the health service, the police, voluntary organisations and the local church—which shows that we all have a responsibility to make child protection a priority. The message must go out that all statutory agencies and all individuals should look out for the needs of children.

Mr. Clarke: I could not agree more. My hon. Friend puts that well. I only add to her list the responsibility of schools and the education profession. Her remarks are a key part of what I am about to say about steps that have been taken to deal with the recommendations of the Laming inquiry.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): In the past, the Secretary of State for Health would probably have been at the Dispatch Box to respond to such a debate, as some of the questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) implied. Do the changes mean that future funding for children's services through social services will come via the Department for Education and Skills as opposed to other Departments? With the Secretary of State's known love of local education authorities, how will he ensure that the money is available to front-line services?

Mr. Clarke: The answer to the first question is yes. We are also bringing together the children's services at the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department to get the coherence that Lord Laming recommended. That is another aspect of common ground. The House knows that Lord Laming recommended that a Cabinet member be responsible for the services. I am that Cabinet member in those circumstances and I take that responsibility extremely seriously.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raises the concern in the social services world that schools might gobble up resources that would otherwise go to social services—I put it more strongly than he did. I am happy to give an assurance that that will not happen. Whether through the ring fencing that exists in, for example, the quality protects arrangements or through other means, we will continue to fund children's services at current or better levels. The coherence of the arrangements that Lord

Laming commended ought to bring together different funding streams to deliver support for children that is better than previous arrangements.

David Wright (Telford): I think that we will hear quite a bit of knocking of local authorities in our debate, but we ought to give credit where credit is due. Has my right hon. Friend seen the excellent initiative in Telford and Wrekin, which uses new technology, including a traffic light system, to track child safety issues? All the agencies are working together so that they can pinpoint whether children are moving into a vulnerable situation, then intervene. We should back local authorities that are doing such excellent work.

Mr. Clarke: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. I was going to come to the question of children's trusts and co-operation. I have not seen what is taking place in Telford and the Wrekin, but I am aware of it and have been briefed on it. It illustrates the important role of local government and the key role of integration, as my hon. Friend said.

Ms Shipley: I welcome both the appointment of a Minister for Children and the fact that my right hon. Friend is the Cabinet link for the Government, but who has key overarching responsibility at local level for bringing together all local services, including the police, health and social services?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend has a tremendous record in this area. I shall not tell her to wait for the Green Paper, but if she will permit me, I shall come to that issue later.

There is common ground, and it is important to take a co-ordinated approach and have a Minister for Children. I am glad that the Opposition motion praises and supports that development. However, I thought that the aside of the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham about delay was unfair, especially as the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard)—she has a distinguished record on these matters and I am delighted to see her in the Chamber—was cited in the *Eastern Daily Press*, which usually, but not always, reports things accurately, as welcoming the proposal. According to the newspaper, she

"welcomed the joining-up of responsibilities, saying it was something she had proposed in 1999."

I do not know whether she was reported accurately, but no doubt she will tell me.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I am grateful to be able to put the record straight. I did indeed publish a pamphlet in 1999 proposing exactly that, but I shall not bore the House with that now or, if I am called to speak, later. The right hon. Gentleman may not be here if I am called, so I should like to pay tribute to him for his support for the work of the all-party group of Norfolk MPs on integration, accountability and transparency. I hope to hear more about those proposals in his remarks.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady, who has confirmed that we have worked together in Norfolk, as well as in other areas—there is important common ground among political parties about many of the points that we are debating. I am delighted that the Opposition support the development in the machinery of government, but I thought that the reference to the time that we had taken to set up a ministerial post was a little unfair, given that no progress was made on that during their time in office.

I had not intended to address this but, in light of the highly personalised remarks by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham, I should like to place on record my view that the Prime Minister made an inspired and strong choice in the appointment of my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge) as Minister for Children. She has a long and distinguished record in this area, and she will put together the cross-governmental approaches that are important in making improvements a reality. My cordial advice to the Opposition is that if they decide to personalise the issue they will be going down a blind alley instead of debating the important issues on which we share common ground.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): Everyone in the House attaches importance to Lord Laming's report and the protection of the most vulnerable children, so I hope that we do not obfuscate our responsibilities by playing a game of personality politics.

Mr. Clarke: I very much agree. There is common ground and a genuine record. That is why I paid tribute to Conservative politicians who had held responsibility in this area. They tried to carry out their responsibilities properly, as colleagues in my party have also sought to do.

My final point of common ground is on the need for co-ordinated provision locally. My hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) asked about local responsibility. We believe that the children's trust approach is important, with the key responsibilities held by education, social, health, police and other services, as she described. The central relationship is that between schools and children's social services. The extended schools approach that we have adopted has been widely welcomed and is constructive. My hon. Friend the Minister for Children recently announced 35 pathfinder children's trusts to go down that course.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge also asked the important question who bears final responsibility. I confess to the House that there is something of a dilemma in that regard. Of the existing office holders, there are three alternative candidates: the director of social services, the director of education and the chief executive. Strong representations have been made to me and to my hon. Friend the Minister for Children that we need to be careful about saying that for all local authorities there is one solution—one of those three candidates—in every situation. There are different local circumstances in each area.

The Green Paper will not say that one of those three people should operate in that way. We will say that there must be local determination, but the key element is that one person must be chosen to bear overall responsibility. The way in which that is done will be set out in the Green Paper. In a moment, I shall deal with the points made by the hon. Member for East Worthing

[Mr. Clarke]

and Shoreham, but I acknowledge my hon. Friend's point that there must be one person who is responsible. However, I will not say that that should always be the director of education, the director of social services or whatever.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way to a sequence of hon. Members and then respond.

Mrs. Humble: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way a second time. When considering the arrangements for the official in charge, will he ensure that appropriate structures are in place? When joint working works well, it often does so because of the personalities involved. When it fails, it is because people committed to doing the work are not there. Although a different approach may be taken in different areas, there must be something in writing to ensure that the scheme does not fail.

Mr. Clarke: There must be not only something in writing, as my hon. Friend describes, and I agree with what she says, but clear responsibility under statute to place the responsibility in the way described. In addition to the different natures of different local authorities with different circumstances, I would add the factor that my hon. Friend identifies: different personalities. For the state centrally to stipulate that ultimate responsibility should always rest with one particular role is not necessarily the right way to proceed. That is an important aspect of the Green Paper consultation that will take place.

Tim Loughton: I want to add to the consensus on that important point, which I mentioned when I said that the buck must stop with somebody. I agree that it should be left to local determination and horses for courses as to who that person is. Can the Secretary of State give an undertaking that whether it is the director of education, the director of social services or a newly created director of children's services, it should be a person at chief executive level or, at a minimum, at director level with whom the buck stops?

Mr. Clarke: I agree. I am prepared to give the assurance that the Green Paper will contain that commitment. As Lord Laming identified in his report, it is critical that there should be a senior level personal responsibility for these matters. However well intentioned and committed individuals lower in the hierarchy may be, the buck must stop at a senior level.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), the key recommendation of the Laming report is not simply, as the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) made clear, that we and all the agencies have a responsibility, but that we should know who is in charge and who is accountable. In recommendation 7, Herbert Laming made it clear that he wanted each local authority within six months to have a management board responsible for these matters and chaired by the local authority chief executive, so that there was no question even of a director-level appointment being distracted by other priorities. Will the Secretary of State accept recommendation 7 or, by implication, not accept it?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman was correct to use the word "accountable", as the key to this matter is an accountability that is not only formal, but genuine in terms of the individual in question feeling that they are responsible. I shall come in a moment to the Laming recommendations, including the one that he mentioned. The fact is that the most important thing that we can achieve in that regard is a clear individual senior board-level responsibility in every local authority, and that is what we will achieve.

The areas of common ground that I have sought to set out represent important common ground across the House generally. On at least three important issues in the motion, there are differences that I hope are not simply about party political point scoring or game playing. The first point of difference is the suggestion that the recruitment of social work professionals has not been proceeded with. That point is set out in the motion and the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham addressed it in his speech. I rebut absolutely the allegation that we have not made progress in this area. Strong steps have been taken and will continue to be taken.

In October 2001, the release of £1.5 million was announced for the first ever social work national recruitment and retention campaign. Over the 12 months to October 2002, the number of applications for social work training increased by at least 6.5 per cent., so an increase was coming through. Since then, new specific grants to councils have been established for human resources development. The grants are of £9.5 million in 2003–04, and there will be £25 million in training grants in 2004–05. Those grants will lead to more appropriate use of staff, ensuring that highly trained workers are used only where their skills are essential. We aim to raise the number of people applying for social worker training by 5,000 by 2005–06, to inform the public about what social workers and social care workers do and make existing social workers and social care workers realise that their work is valued. In the 18 months after the campaign was launched, there were more than 50,000 calls to the helpline and hits on the website.

I rebut the charge made by the hon. Gentleman. Of course, I will always acknowledge that we need continually to do better and that important recruitment and retention issues remain, and those will be addressed in the Green Paper. However, the charge in the motion tabled in the name of the Leader of the Opposition is false and I rebut it entirely.

Tim Loughton: I remember the speech made by the Secretary of State for Health at the Local Government Association conference. In announcing that £1.5 million would be provided for a training programme, he pointed the finger of blame at many of the social services employees, councillors and representatives who were present at the event. What the Secretary of State cannot tell us is how many people have been recruited as social workers. Many people may have rung the hotline or

applied for training places, but how many are ending up as social workers in key positions? His own Department cannot produce those figures, but it is they that matter.

Mr. Clarke: Those figures form part of the figures that matter, but only part. The number of people going into training, the quality of the courses and so on are also important. That is why the fact that we are training people is important in achieving precisely the end to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

The most important allegation that the hon. Gentleman made, which I rebut and is a point of difference between us, is the suggestion that we have done absolutely nothing to implement the Laming report over this period. That too is untrue. *[Interruption.]* He is demurring, but his motion says that the House should note

"that, of the 108 recommendations by Lord Laming, 82 were recommended to be acted upon within six months".

It goes on to say that we have not been doing the work that we need to do in those areas. Does he accept that we are implementing Laming?

Mr. Loughton: The point is that we do not know, as we have no evidence. That is what we are waiting for. It was promised that the Green Paper would provide the evidence about what the Government were doing, choosing not to take up from the Laming report and so on. That is why the motion is there—we do not know and we are waiting for the evidence.

Mr. Clarke: I shall come to the Green Paper, but I want to answer the hon. Gentleman's helpful question by telling him what we are doing to implement the Laming report.

On self-audits and inspection activity, Ministers set out, on the day of publication of the Climbié inquiry report, a checklist covering 56 of its recommendations on basic good practice. That was followed up with self-audit tools whereby social services, health services and the police were asked to guarantee that those recommendations were put in place within three months. My Department has received all the responses, which are broadly positive and indicate that most services are following the basic good practice recommendations of the Laming report. Those who are not will be followed up by the relevant inspectorate. The responses are being analysed fully to provide the information that the hon. Gentleman wants. We have been proceeding in accordance with Laming and shall continue to do so.

As regards the services in north London, the health, police and social services inspectorates are undertaking joint monitoring of the local services that failed Victoria Climbié. Haringey was inspected in March 2003, Brent was inspected in May 2003, and Ealing and Enfield will be inspected in July 2003. Full reports of the findings for those four boroughs will be published in due course and followed up as necessary in each area to ensure that local services are satisfactory and have addressed the various issues raised by Lord Laming.

All the relevant inspectorates have reviewed their planned individual and joint inspection activity. The chief inspectors concerned have met to consider the outcome of those reviews and to plan for the next triennial joint chief inspectors' children's safeguards report. There will be an integrated inspections framework for children and a lead inspectorate for children's services—namely, the Office for Standards in Education, or Ofsted—to assess joint working and the achievement of outcomes and standards.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I want to clarify the Secretary of State's intentions on inspectorates. Is he saying that the lead responsibility for co-ordinating joint inspections of children's services will be held by Ofsted, and not by the Commission for Social Care Inspection?

Mr. Clarke: I am saying that the lead responsibility will be with Ofsted and that it will be an integrated approach. The Green Paper will set out the precise process by which we get to that point.

On training, a review is being undertaken involving all the relevant bodies in health, social care, education and the police. The initial stage of that review identified current standards for inter-agency training. The second stage, which is to report by the end of this September, will make recommendations on the changes that might be implemented to improve inter-agency training. The Government are in the process of commissioning training materials to accompany the booklet, "What To Do If You're Worried A Child Is Being Abused". Social work training has recently undergone reform, with the new three-year social work degree from September 2003, new funding of £7 million in 2003–04 for practice learning to support individual students, and the creation of learning resource centres and skills laboratories.

On guidance, on 19 May the then Health Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), launched a clear and concise booklet for people working with children and families—"What To Do If You're Worried A Child Is Being Abused". It is designed to be clearer than existing guidance in order to help people get to grips with the best-practice approach for safeguarding children. By publishing a single set of guidelines for all those working with children and families, we intend to eliminate any need for local bodies to produce their own. That is in direct response to Lord Laming's concern about the amount of out-of-date local guidance that he found in the services involved with Victoria Climbié. We will also update the guidance on the Children Act 1989 to make it shorter and clearer.

Ms Shipley: I welcome the guidance, but is my right hon. Friend aware that it often does not reach people on the ground? Can he give me an assurance that sampling will take place across the country to find out whether the guidance is being disseminated and acted upon?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. Indeed, Lord Laming dealt with adequacy and the extent to which it informed the way in which professionals operate. I can give the assurances that my hon. Friend seeks: we are simplifying the guidance and ensuring that it reaches every professional through training, and that we will test whether we are succeeding through the statistical techniques that she mentioned.

Mr. Burstow: I want to emphasise a question that Conservative Members have already asked and that I

[Mr. Burstow]

raised during the statement on the Laming inquiry: when does the Secretary of State expect to issue the overdue and much-needed guidance on sharing confidential information between agencies? The lack of clarity causes grave anxiety for many agencies and gets in the way of good, integrated childcare practice.

Mr. Clarke: I cannot give a firm date, but I shall ask my hon. Friend the Minister for Children whether she can provide further information when she responds to the debate.

I do not want to spend much time considering children's trusts, because we dealt with the point in earlier exchanges. However, many recommendations in Lord Laming's report relate to the lack of co-ordination and communication between the relevant agencies. We believe that children's trusts are the way forward; they are already being established to help tackle such issues. They are intended to bring together some or all of the services that local education authorities, social services, health or criminal justice services commission and/or provide for children. They may also include other services for children up to the age of 19. Local authorities will be the lead organisations. We believe that such integration is the way forward, so we held a bidding process that led to the announcement of 35 pathfinder projects to establish the best way in which to proceed.

Let us consider the national service framework and the way in which hospitals deal with children who need protection. All health and social services bodies should work to common standards, and on 10 April 2003 the Government published the first part of the national service framework for children, young people and maternity services, including a standard for hospital services. The full framework, to be published in 2004, will set standards for child protection services against which health and social care organisations will be inspected. We have a 10-year programme for improving health and social care services for children and young people. The standard takes account of Lord Laming's recommendations that apply to children in hospital.

Andrew Selous: Will the Secretary of State tell us his views on the balance between prevention and cure, especially in the context of couple stability and parenting courses? What are his views on mainstreaming some of that activity?

Mr. Clarke: My thinking was pre-echoed, if such a scientific concept exists, by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble). We must move from saying that social workers are the only people responsible for children's protection and security to a position whereby a wide range of professionals and their communities believe that that is part of their overall responsibility. We believe that the different professional structures, funding and bidding regimes have not fostered that necessary sense of mutual and collective responsibility. The Green Paper will be centred on tackling that point. It will stress that social workers alone cannot bear all the responsibility. The teams and approaches and the collaborations between that profession and others are vital.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): Although it is understandable that today's focus is on intervention when things go wrong, does my right hon. Friend accept that investment in promoting positive parenting means that things will go right most of time?

Mr. Clarke: Absolutely. One of the aspects of which the Government can be most proud is the sure start programme, which has tried to make my hon. Friend's point central. If I can use jargon, mainstreaming the sure start approach is important for everything that we must try to achieve. Many Labour colleagues are keen for that to happen and I hope that that applies to colleagues in other parties.

A further recommendation by Lord Laming referred to the review of private fostering. We have noted the recommendation in his report that the law on the registration of private foster carers should be reviewed. Consequently, the Social Care Institute for Excellence was commissioned to undertake a study into the effectiveness of child-minding registration and its implications for private fostering. The report is due for publication shortly and it will inform our conclusions.

So, I reject the charge that we have not been active enough in acting on Lord Laming's recommendations. My colleagues in the Department of Health and in my own Department who have taken on these responsibilities have been energetic and vigilant in seeking to make progress on the approach set out by Lord Laming, and I emphasise that they will continue to be so.

Mr. Lansley: Given what the Secretary of State has just said, is he in a position to say how many of the 82 recommendations in Herbert Laming's report that were intended to be implemented within six months have been so implemented? Perhaps the Secretary of State can also now answer my question on recommendation 7.

Mr. Clarke: I am advised by my hon. Friend the Minister for Children that about 83 of the 108 recommendations have been partially or fully implemented at this stage. I have tried to set out as clearly as I can that we have made major progress.

The final point of difference—an important one—is the suggestion that the delay in the publication of the Green Paper on children is a key problem. The Opposition put that point at the core of their motion, and it was also a central part of the speech made by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham. The delay is of one parliamentary week. We shall publish the Green Paper in the week in which the House comes back after the recess.

We have delayed the publication by one parliamentary week for two reasons. First, the recommendations of the Green Paper—I acknowledge that it is a Green Paper and not a White Paper—are very far-reaching in a great many respects. We want to ensure that, when we publish it, we take full account of the changes in the machinery of government to which I have referred, and of the informal conversations that we have held with interested organisations in the field, such as professionals and representatives of local government. The exchange that we had a few moments ago about the appropriate person to be the named individual with the

right level of responsibility illustrates how difficult and delicate that issue is. I want to ensure that the Green Paper reflects those dilemmas in the best way possible.

The first reason for the delay is, therefore, that the Green Paper is a far-reaching document, and I want to ensure that I get it right. We also want to take full account of the machinery of government changes that we have made, and of the initial responses that we have received.

Tim Loughton: Before the Secretary of State tries to convince us that this is a delay of only one parliamentary week, will he acknowledge that that delay will involve children not getting for two months the attention from the Green Paper that we were promised? This is not the first delay but the second. The Prime Minister promised us last October—a promise that the Secretary of State reiterated in January—that the Green Paper would be published in the spring, which is now some months behind us.

Mr. Clarke: I do not accept that for a second. It might be an illusion that is current in the Conservative party. Publishing a Green Paper is not the same as doing something. To publish a Green Paper is to get to the policy decisions that we have to take. The protections that we are applying and the work that we are doing are going on in precisely the way that I have described, and they would go on regardless of when or in what way the Green Paper was published. I have outlined in some detail the work that is going on. The suggestion that professional social workers in social services departments are stopping doing their work of protecting the people in their care because they are waiting for the publication of a Green Paper is simply wrong. Equally, the legislation that we prefer is in place.

Tim Loughton: Listen to the Local Government Association.

Mr. Clarke: I listen to the LGA in a number of ways, but I do not accept its assessment of every issue.

The second reason for the delay is that the Prime Minister associates himself with this initiative, as we made clear at the time. That is because the seriousness and scale of it will require commitment right across government to ensure that it will work. We wanted to make sure that that could be the case.

It is always possible to score political points on these questions, although I advise the Opposition against so doing.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): That is what we are here for.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Lady says that we are here to score political points.

Mrs. Laing: What we as an Opposition are here for is to hold the Government to account. It is right for us to ask questions—lots of questions—which should be answered by a Government who are not doing enough.

Mr. Clarke: I agree with every word that the hon. Lady has said, although it is an interesting elaboration of what she said about scoring political points. At our last education Question Time, when my hon. Friend the Minister for Children was present, there was not a single question from the Opposition about how we would implement our proposals. By all means let them ask questions, but they should ask about the substance of what we are doing and how we are doing it, rather than scoring cheap political points. The hon. Lady has been scoring them ever since my hon. Friend's appointment. She is wrong to do so; she should talk about the substance.

What is important about the Green Paper is what it says and the policies that it sets out. This historic step builds on what the Government have already achieved with, for instance, provision for children aged three and four and the sure start programme, but for the first time allows us to make a major advance in providing for the welfare and protection of children. My party and I will be happy to be judged on the basis of the Green Paper, and the stability that I believe it will offer the entire profession. I hope that Members will support the amendment.

5.26 pm

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): First, I should like to record the fact that I act as a parliamentary ambassador for the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and I am grateful for the opportunity of doing so.

I congratulate the Conservatives on choosing this as the subject of one of their Opposition day debates, for it is important. It is only sad that, since the publication of the Laming report through a statement in the House on 28 January, we have not had a debate in Government time that would have allowed issues raised by Members on both sides to be put to the relevant Minister. It would have been useful to learn the extent to which 83 of the 108 Laming recommendations, to which the Secretary of State referred, had been met. It would be helpful if Ministers felt able to write to Members who have taken an interest today about what progress is being made.

What we should be saying is that what counts is the protection of vulnerable children from harm, and giving them an opportunity to thrive and develop. We are glad that the Government have drawn together all the threads of their policy on children in a single Minister and a single Department. This should not be about personalities; it should be about the substance of policy, and whether that policy turns into practice that makes a real difference to the lives of not just vulnerable children, but every child in the country. That should be the litmus test against which we judge this or any other Government.

As the Secretary of State said, Victoria Climbié died on 25 February 2000. It was a tragic death, and we need only turn the pages of the Laming report to see that it was a preventable death. Poor practice on the part of social workers, police and medical staff let Victoria slip through the net. As others have said, the key feature of the Laming report was its acknowledgement that the problems could not be laid just at the door of social workers and social services, and that responsibility was shared by a range of agencies. This was, perhaps, the first time that that had been acknowledged.

[Mr. Paul Burstow]

It is to the Government's shame that, three and a half years later, the country is still waiting for a definitive response to Laming. It is a damning indictment that we have not had an opportunity during Government time—there has been time during the months that have elapsed since the statement—to have an Adjournment debate that would inform the Government's own thinking during the development of their Green Paper. That, surely, would have been a useful part of the consultation process.

As we have heard today, the

"long-awaited Green Paper on Children at Risk"

has already been delayed, and has now been postponed again. In early November last year we were told that the Green Paper would be published in early 2003. That was later refined to spring 2003. By January this year, the talk was that publication was imminent—in the next few weeks. Then everything went quiet. The Laming report was published and we learned that the Green Paper would contain the Government's response to Laming's 108 recommendations. In May we were told that the Green Paper would be published "any time now". By mid-June, the message was that it would published before the House rose on 17 July. It is not here, and we now hear from the Secretary of State that it will be delayed by only one week.

Mr. Charles Clarke: One parliamentary week.

Mr. Burstow: Well, of course "parliamentary" is the important word. While that might be a semi-persuasive argument for some of the right hon. Gentleman's Back Benchers, it would be difficult to try to spin that argument to those outside the House who have been waiting and waiting for the definitive response. That is not a credible argument to answer the accusation that the report has been delayed. Now we learn that one of the reasons is that the Prime Minister's diary is too full before the summer recess and, therefore, it seems that the needs of vulnerable children are to take second place to the Prime Minister's need for a good news story.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): That is a disgusting thing to say.

Mr. Burstow: It is disgusting, and that is why I made the point. If that is why publication has been delayed, it is outrageous.

The Secretary of State has told us that the Green Paper will be a pivotal and essential document, and that that is why the Government are taking time to review it carefully and ensure that it fits in with all the other changes of which he spoke. If it is such a substantive change, how can he then say that it is only a Green Paper that will not make much difference? That would seem to be the conclusion that we should draw from his concluding remarks. When the Minister replies to the debate, perhaps she can tell us what will happen in those weeks that do not exist in parliamentary terms—the summer recess. Will she take the draft report with her on her summer holidays to revise it and rewrite it—yet again? It has already been many months in production.

The Conservative motion rightly points to the Government's failure to address the issue of social work recruitment. Last August, the chief inspector of social services commented on the impact of staffing shortages. She said:

"In the councils inspected an average 3 per cent. of cases of children on the child protection register were not allocated and an average 5 per cent. of looked after children were not allocated to a social worker. From a sample of case files, doubts were raised about arrangements to protect one in eight children. Inspectors took the view that the welfare of children was adequately safeguarded in only 21 out of 32 councils. A particular area of concern was staff recruitment which was insufficiently robust to ensure adequate safeguards."

Those percentages sound small, but the detail shows that for looked-after children alone, that adds up to 4,000 children without an advocate, or even a safety net. If the arrangements for safeguarding children are poor, that means question marks over the safety of a further 11,250 children.

The latest figures from the Local Government Association paint a sorry picture of staff issues. For example, high vacancy rates stand now at 9.8 per cent. and turnover rates are even higher, at 15.3 per cent. Those figures mask marked regional variations, with the south-east, south-west and London having particular difficulties. As a result, social services departments have to place great reliance on agency staff.

According to the latest figures published, there are some 376,000 children in need in England alone. They are some of the most vulnerable in our society. Ensuring that each and every one of those children, and their families, gets the right support, at the right time and in the right place, is a complex and demanding job. Its success hinges on the actions of a host of different agencies, each with its own values, personalities, priorities, performance targets, skills and resources.

The need to weld those agencies together to ensure that they deliver a seamless response, tailored to the needs of children and their families is obvious in theory—we have debated the theory for years and years—but it often does not turn out right in practice. Fine judgments have to be made about hard cases, in which none of the options is perfect. Decisions have to be taken with limited opportunity for reflection and limited access to specialist advice and consultation. Child deaths can, and do, occur when the professionals involved—from health, social care, education or the police—are inexperienced, poorly trained, overloaded and under-supervised. In the context of the Laming findings, it seems that they are also poorly led by those at the top of the organisations for which they work.

The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) intervened earlier to note that the language used in this House and in the media about the quality of social work in this country denigrates and devalues that work. He said that it puts people off going into the profession. I agree with him, and with the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). We need to raise the status of social work and make working in it an attractive proposition.

For that reason, I was surprised when I read last September's *Community Care* magazine interview with the Leader of the Opposition. He chose to talk about how social workers always take time off for courses, as

though that were a problem. Yet one of the key issues to emerge from inquires into child deaths has been the inadequacy of training across professions that would allow them to work more effectively together. That was a sad message for the right hon. Gentleman to give to social workers.

The death of Victoria Climbié at the hands of her aunt and her aunt's boyfriend was a tragedy, but it was not an isolated one. From the death of Maria Colwell in 1973 to the present day, many of the issues to emerge from the inquires have stayed the same. Unfortunately, however, not every child registers on the child protection radar screen. Most abuse in this country goes unreported. Every week, one to two children die following abuse or neglect.

Home Office figures show clearly that child homicide rates have not fallen for 25 years or more. We have cut child deaths on our roads, and reduced the risk of disease and illness in children, but child death rates as a result of neglect or abuse have remained unchanged. There is still no system in this country for the systematic follow-up of child deaths, nor one that gives a clear picture of both individual cases and the flow of cases. We need a clear picture so that we can use it to develop policy and, more importantly, practice on the ground. As a result of the lack of a clear picture, the full extent of child death in this country remains largely hidden.

Last year's report from the UN committee on the rights of the child expressed alarm at the lack of a co-ordinated strategy to reduce child deaths. When the Green Paper is finally published in one parliamentary week's time, I hope that it will set out a strategy for bearing down on the problem of child deaths in this country. Indeed, I hope that it will set out clearly how the Government will translate the principles enshrined in the UN convention on the rights of the child into policy, law and practice.

One reform that is long overdue, and which has aroused press speculation in recent days, is the establishment of a children's rights commissioner for England. The Select Committee on Health and the Joint Committee on Human Rights have very recently recommended that such an office be set up, and I recently introduced a private Member's Bill on the same subject. It is an issue that hon. Members of all parties have championed and campaigned for for many years.

A children's commissioner would be a guardian of the human rights of all children, not just those within the care system. A children's commissioner would not be the manager of child protection services, or of a Government welfare or quality assurance programme. I hope that the Green Paper will contain the good news that the post will be part of the Government's programme, and that the Government will learn the lessons both from what has happened in Wales already and from the recently established commissioner post in Northern Ireland.

So far, the Government have focused more narrowly on the rights of children in regulated care services. The children's rights director is a valuable post, but it is limited. Indeed, the new health and social care commissions mean that the director's writ will not extend to children in the NHS, private health care or hospices. That is an omission that I hope that the Green Paper can address, so that the children's rights director has a right to be consulted by the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection. There is no such provision at the moment.

The Conservative motion is also right to point to the difficulties that delaying the Green Paper's publication has caused. I intervened earlier on the Secretary of State to raise recommendation 16 of Lord Laming's report, which states:

"The Government should issue guidance on the Data Protection Act 1998, the Human Rights Act 1998, and common law rules on confidentiality. The Government should issue guidance as and when these impact on the sharing of information between professional groups in circumstances where there are concerns about the welfare of children and families."

Surely, that is a critical recommendation. The ability to pass information freely but confidentially between agencies to protect the welfare of children is vital, yet confusion still reigns, so I hope that when the Minister for Children comes to the Dispatch Box she will bring clarity where currently there is none.

I hope, too, that, in her reply to the debate, the hon. Lady can clear up confusion on another point. The Children's Act annual report, published last week, refers to the Munby judgment. The Prison Service and the Home Office had argued that the Act did not apply in full to prisons. The court held that it did and required that guidance be changed to reflect that. The annual report states that the Department of Health is working with the Home Office and others to consider the implications of the judgment. Can the Minister tell us whether the Department of Health will still undertake that task or is that another of the issues that she will take forward? It would be useful to know to whom one should address questions about the outcome of the Government's review.

I raise the issue because, last year, the UN committee on the rights of the child expressed serious concern about the Government's approach to the high and increasing number of children in custody at earlier ages for lesser offences. In addition, I am concerned about the increasing use of restraint in custody. Figures in the UN report highlight the fact that, in two years, 296 children sustained injuries following restraint and control in prison.

The joint chief inspectors' report "Safeguarding Children" revealed that the weaknesses in the Government's current arrangements for the protection of young children are letting children suffer serious harm, or even die, in custody. The report states:

"An analysis of surveys undertaken of young people in Young Offenders Institutions revealed that 24 per cent. reported incidents of assault by other young people, 14 per cent. reported that they felt unsafe some of the time and six per cent. felt unsafe often. In one Young Offenders Institution, there were over 700 reported incidents of injuries to young people over an eight-month period."

That is a huge number, but I am concerned not only about injuries but also about deaths.

Since 1997, 93 young people have committed suicide while in custody. Detention and training orders seem to have led to an increase in jail sentences, apparently in the mistaken belief that that would result in more rehabilitation. Many children in custody should not have been put there in the first place. Half of them are casualties of an under-resourced and over-pressured child protection system. So far, the Government have refused to lift their reservation on the UN convention in

[Mr. Burstow]

respect of the detention of children in adult prisons. The UK locks up more children than any European country, which is a scandal.

The Government amendment talks a lot about more resources, but, interestingly, not much about outcomes and delivery. Can the Minister be more specific about outcomes and delivery? On resources and the budgetary pressures faced by local authorities, 60 per cent. of the overspend on social services budgets is accounted for by children's services. How will the Government address the constant pressure, year after year, on resources that were intended for adult social services but are being redirected to fund children's services? Extra resources are having to be brought in due to inadequate funding of such services.

Last year, the Government published the Wanless report on health care funding. Throughout that welcome report, it was recognised that health and social care were two sides of the same coin. The report recommended that further work should be carried out on social care funding. Can the Government tell the House whether such work will be commissioned? As well as the important Green Paper that we are expecting in due course, we need some indication of the long-term funding that will achieve the step change that the Government and the Liberal Democrats want to see.

The Secretary of State referred to children's trusts. On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I want to make it clear that we support the pathfinder project on children's trusts. We welcome an approach that Governments do not always follow—learning from experimentation before rolling out a particular model. That is undoubtedly the right way forward. We especially welcome the fact that it will offer an opportunity to explore and learn about the benefits of integration in the commissioning of health and social care—albeit only for children, but it is a good step in the right direction. Liberal Democrats can certainly make common cause with the Government on that point.

The Secretary of State mentioned the national service framework and said that the first standard was published in April. A second standard has already been published, but it now appears that the rest of it will be published on a piecemeal basis. Will the Minister tell us at the end of the debate whether all the other standards will be published at some point next year? Is it to be a part-work, like some of those dreary publications produced by national publishers, or will the Government produce one single document?

Will the Minister tell us whether the social exclusion unit report, which was due out last October, will be subsumed within the Green Paper? That is not clear. We understood that a paper was to be published last year, but it has not been published.

There are some concerns about the Green Paper, which have been echoed by a number of the professional organisations and others outside this place, in particular the worry that the Government may in some way confuse accountability with management and that, as a result of the Green Paper, there will be more proposals for organisational change—functional change—rather than cultural change throughout these organisations, which is what we really need.

When the Secretary of State answered a question earlier, he acknowledged that that should be a matter for local determination. It should not be for this place or for Ministers to say that local authorities will have a specific person to take on the lead role at a local level, but that person should be at a senior enough level to have the clout and ability to get things done. That is the key point that I hope will come out of all the recommendations in the Green Paper.

However, there needs to be a clear duty not only on local authorities but on all the agencies that work at a local level, to come to the table, contribute and play their part in child protection and children's services. That does not happen at present. Area child protection committees are not on a statutory basis—some are good, some are excellent and some are totally useless. We need to get that right. I hope that the Green Paper will deal with that and that the Minister will be able to tell us whether that is what is intended for the future.

Reference has been made to the need to integrate services. Undoubtedly, that is a key part of how we can make a difference to all children and to those who may be at risk or who are vulnerable to harm and abuse. However, we need more than a whole-systems approach; we need a whole-society approach. That is fundamental. We all have a responsibility for the safety and well-being of our children and that needs to be a key part of any strategy that emerges from this or any other Government. We need an approach to children—all children—that values them, does not stigmatise them, and is ambitious for all of them and protective of those who need extra support.

I have referred several times to the UN convention on the rights of the child, which I hope will be a key part of the document that is to come out later this year. Those rights are critical to how policy and practice should be shaped: the right to life and maximum development, the right to protection from torture and inhumane or degrading treatment, and the right that all actions involving children should have their best interests as the primary consideration. Those are clear rights that provide clear purpose and direction for the development of public policy and practice.

Child protection is not the preserve of any single profession. Local government may have its lead responsibility in that area, but if its partners in health and elsewhere are not fully engaged it cannot succeed.

In the past 30 years, public policy has failed to reduce the number of child deaths in this country. Too many of the milestones in the development of child protection policy and practice in those years have been the gravestones of dead children. We can all agree on the goals, and many of those that the Secretary of State set out are the common ground on which we should build a good policy that makes a real difference for all our children, not just a few of them.

5.48 pm

Mr. Shaun Woodward (St. Helens, South): I welcome this debate, as do all hon. Members. It is terribly important. As someone who has been the deputy chairman of ChildLine and remains a trustee, I know that the debate will be keenly followed there and throughout all the children's charities.

My only regret is that I suspect that while this may be one of the most important debates that we have, the pretext for having it was probably not so well intended. For us to debate this subject on a motion that probably has a lot more to do with personality politics does no credit to the House and little credit to the Conservative party. The debate has provided an opportunity—some would describe it as opportunism—to attack the Minister. It has provided an opportunity for the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) to talk about his party's belief in arguing for a Minister for Children.

Well, I have a little experience of the Conservative party, and I do not remember the creation of a Minister for Children being party policy at the 1997 general election. Indeed, before a small incident led to my departure from that political party, I remember making a speech at the Social Market Foundation in 1999 in which I argued for a Minister for Children, and my then boss, who should perhaps remain nameless, told me that creating a Minister for Children would certainly not be a policy of the Conservative party. So we are talking about short-term memories here. It ill behoves Conservative Members to remind of us such things, because we can remember quite a lot as well—and I will have a little pleasure in remembering one or two things during my remarks.

I looked at the press releases from the Leader of the Opposition about the appointment of my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge) to her Front-Bench job. It is unfortunate that they were so personality-driven. The House could achieve extraordinary consensus on this issue and a great deal for children in this country, but that requires us to lay aside the kind of differences that have given rise to the debate today.

The fact of the matter is that there is no magic fix, and if we are not careful, we set ourselves up for failure for one very simple reason: whatever the Green Paper may produce in a few weeks' time, it will not end child abuse or child deaths by the end of the year. Since 1973, there have been 35 reports on child protection. Since 1945, there have been 70 reports on severe child abuse. Not one of those reports—some were produced under Conservative Governments, supported by the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing)—ended child abuse or the deaths of children in terrible circumstances. We must be sensible about the idea that the Green Paper is somehow a piece of magic that will end child abuse—it will not—but it may make things better.

The excellent recent report by the Select Committee on Health very sensibly considers some of Lord Laming's proposals, and it says that we need to be careful; we could get things wrong. No hon. Member on either side of the House wants us to get anything wrong in respect of protecting vulnerable children. The idea seems to be that, somehow, all we need to do is produce the Green Paper as quickly as possible and all will be well, but the opposite could be true; we could make mistakes, and I hope that we all want to avoid doing so.

ChildLine—an organisation with which I have been involved for a long time—counsels hundreds of thousands of kids every year. Last year alone, we counselled nearly 30,000 children who were in need of protection. Mercifully, that protection was given, but in some cases things go wrong and a child slips through the net, with one agency or another. That is very clearly what happened with Victoria Climbié.

There are many lessons for all of us to learn. They are not just about social workers, but about the culture in which we operate. Again, the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham, the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman, rightly said that we should be very careful about laying the blame on social workers. Of course we should not do that—but again, if we are not careful, the idea may be that the Green Paper will solve all those problems.

Victoria Climbié was not murdered by a social worker. She was not murdered by a Member of Parliament. She was murdered by people who were supposed to be looking after her. That culture goes to the heart of things. Interestingly, Lord Laming's report and the Select Committee on Health report cite the cultural background of such things and what we learnt from the Stephen Lawrence case. There are cultural issues to do with colour, race and ethnicity, and those issues must also be considered. Such problems will not be solved by referring them to one department. With all due respect to my hon. Friend the Minister for Children, even if she were the best thing since sliced bread—as I am sure she is—the truth is that she will not solve all the problems either. We might just make them a bit better.

At ChildLine, over nearly 20 years, we have learned a great deal about what needs to be done. One of the things that we learned about was the importance of tackling bullying, which was a terribly important issue. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Epping Forest, who, with me, when I was in the Conservative party, recognised the damage that something like section 28 did to young people. She knew that there was a culture of bullying with it. It is a difficult issue, because it drives some division within her party. None the less, she was ahead of her party on the issue and she rightly campaigned for reform. To hear her colleague, the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham talking about campaigning on children's issues—I seem to remember that he was not exactly in the forefront in campaigning for the reform of section 28—beggars belief. Given the motion that we are debating today, I can only expect that, if the Opposition continue in this direction, they will shortly be tabling a motion complaining about the Government's failure to reform section 28 quickly enough. If they do so, I will welcome it, because it will be great if reform can be driven further and more quickly on these matters, which is important.

Bullying remains a problem. We do not solve it simply by introducing a bullying code into schools. It is not solved overnight. Only a week or so ago, in Merseyside, a young lad of 11 died, having been bullied at school. That is an appalling, unnecessary death. God forbid, there will probably be more. But if we work together, we might make the climate better.

Another big issue on which the hon. Member for Epping Forest might like to take the lead with her party would be, for example, the ending of the defence of reasonable chastisement. Sadly, at the moment, the Government clearly feel that they need to be cautious on this issue. Yet domestic violence is no longer tolerated, and we are not happy to see two men coming out of the pub on a Friday night thumping the heck out of each other—we think that they should be arrested and

[Mr. Shaun Woodward]

punished. We do not tolerate men and women hitting each other inside the home—we think that something should be done about it. Again, the Government will be taking steps over the next few months to do more to deal with domestic violence. Yet, bizarrely, we find ourselves saying that it is okay to thump a child.

This seems to me to create an extraordinary climate. What we are saying to people—I know that this will not make me very popular with the *Daily Mail*, but I have not been popular with that paper for a number of years now—is that we are sanctioning violence. We need to tackle a culture of violence which, at its most ruthless end, has dire consequences. Again, I ask the *Daily Mail* please not to make a travesty of what I am saying. I am not suggesting that ordinary parents who give their child a clip behind the ear are indulging in anything that relates to what happened to Victoria Climbié. Of course I am not saying that. But it helps to create a culture in which we can somehow tolerate violence.

Again, the hon. Member for Epping Forest may want to take the lead in her party on these issues, because it seems to me that continuing to sanction with the defence of reasonable chastisement the hitting of children is something that, sooner or later, the House will be brave enough to deal with. In a similar way that, I suppose, people look back on wife beating now, in 100 years they will look back and say how ridiculous it was that, in 2003, we had a society that still allowed children to be hit.

Like many Members, I am sure, I have four children, and I have once in my life hit one of them. Tom was four years old, and he had shut the door on his younger sister's fingers and had really hurt her. I did not know what to do, and, like lots of parents, I am afraid, I lost it. I gave him quite a hard smack. The story is legendary in our family—the kids say, "Do you remember the time Daddy smacked Tom?" I thought to myself afterwards, that if he was shocked, I was much more shocked. It was not a particularly hard hit, but it shocked me that I could lose my temper and hit a child whom I loved so much. I realised, of course, that the next time, to achieve any effect, I would have to hit him a bit harder, and then, perhaps, a bit harder. Probably, what ends up happening is what happened to me when I was a kid, which was that I started getting hit with implements. People might ask whether that is the reason why I am as I am—it did not do me much good and I am sure that it would not do my kids any good.

I pay tribute to the work of Esther Rantzen and charities such as ChildLine for taking a brave stance and recognising ahead of their time that smacking ultimately contributes to a violent culture, which is a problem that we must tackle. That is another issue on which the hon. Member for Epping Forest may lead her party.

We should appreciate the steps that have been taken regarding the Laming report. The announcement of the establishment of children's trusts last week is important. Again, there is no magic involved. We are at the beginning of a process that will hopefully allow us to do more.

I want to refer several important pieces of information from ChildLine to my hon. Friend the Minister because they arise from listening to children. First, excellent research done by the charity shows that children aged over 16 are often passed from one authority to the other, and that no authority is prepared to take responsibility for them. It is important to address that. Secondly, getting help for children and young people, which is a serious issue, appears to be more difficult in February and March—toward the end of the financial year—than at other times. That is an important consideration when we make decisions on resources.

Thirdly, little support is available for homeless 16 and 17-year-olds who live on the streets to enable them to try to escape from abusive home situations.

Fourthly, there is a serious concern about the lack of safe houses for young people throughout the United Kingdom. Such facilities do not provide long-term solutions for young people but they are needed to offer respite and assessment for vulnerable young people.

ChildLine has identified a further problem from its night service. Children who ring at night in need of help often find it difficult to get help because social services are more overstretched at that time. That fact is not a condemnation of social services or social workers. I tell Conservative Members—their motion is pretty condemning of the Government—that the only years since the early 1990s between which the number of social workers went down were 1995 and 1996. The number has increased in every other year. It is difficult to accept a Conservative motion that condemns the Government for doing insufficient to protect children given that the number of social workers reduced under the Conservative Government. I say that only to illustrate the danger of getting into point scoring. The right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley), the former Secretary of State for Health, is sitting on the Conservative Benches and I know that she cares passionately about working for children. There is a danger of getting into petty political point scoring when we could do more than that, which is why I regret the fact that the debate has been personalised around my hon. Friend the Minister for Children.

The Joint Committee on Human Rights, of which I am a member, has rightly argued for a children's commissioner for England, as have hon. Members. Children need not only a Minister but an independent voice that is above party politics so that important points may be made regardless of the political party in power. Children are too important for us to play politics with. I hope that the delay to the Green Paper will give my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister the opportunity to announce that the children of England will finally have a children's commissioner when the Green Paper is published.

6.3 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I am really pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this extremely important debate, not least because it is clear that no hon. Member could fail to be moved by the fate of Victoria Climbié. No one could fail to be impatient for action some six months after the publication of the distinguished and comprehensive

inquiry into her death. As the Secretary of State said, I also have a constituency interest. Several hon. Members will know that I had the opportunity to make a presentation to the Climbié inquiry on behalf of an all-party group of Norfolk MPs. I must place on record my gratitude to the Secretary of State for giving his unreserved support to our conclusions when he was in his former post. The presentation detailed some of the lessons that were drawn from the harrowing case of my six-year-old constituent Lauren Wright, who died after months of abuse at the hands of her stepmother on 6 May 2000—about the same time as Victoria.

I shall be very brief as others wish to speak. I shall give the bare facts about the circumstances of Lauren's death and then, equally briefly, lay out some of the conclusions that the all-party group drew from that sad affair. It was characterised, like the case of Victoria, by a series of errors, muddles, communications failures and general professional sloppiness—the same sort of failures that, all too often, are revealed by the cases of the 80 or so children who die each year in this country from abuse or neglect.

Lauren Wright, my constituent, died from a blow to her abdomen, with extreme bruising all over her body, on 6 May 2000, two days before the date of the case conference that Norfolk social services had finally organised to discuss her plight. From her birth she had been known to Hertfordshire social services. She was known to Norfolk social services for the three years before her death. For the 16 months before she died she was at primary school—a two-teacher, 29-pupil primary school in which she could hardly get lost. During that time, aged six, she lost four stone in weight. She was seen by a community paediatrician and a general practitioner, and again by a paediatrician just a couple of months before she died. She was visited by social workers. Too late they alerted the area child protection committee, and too late the case conference was finally convened for a date after her death.

The real concerns about this case are that Lauren's treatment at the hands of her stepmother, who was eventually convicted of her manslaughter, took place in public, observed by the local community, and under the supervision of doctors, social workers and teachers. Trial evidence revealed that the stepmother was seen hitting the child and screaming abuse at her; that she fed her pepper sandwiches; that she put bugs from the garden in her food; and that she turned off the taps so tightly that the child could not get a drink of water.

Lauren's class teacher said at the trial that she saw marks on Lauren

"lots of times, often she was covered with lots of small bruises and with major bruises about once a month. These included black eyes, bruising on her face and scratches across her back."

As I said, at the time of her death, she weighed little more than two stone. In the words of her head teacher, her physical deterioration had been

"apparent for at least five months before she died."

Of course, Lauren was killed by her stepmother. The hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward) rightly makes it clear that not all blame can be placed at the door of professionals, and that is definitely so. The stepmother was clearly very plausible. The trial was told that she had an IQ of 78. She certainly deceived doctors, teacher and social workers, and Lauren died as a result. But from this sad case we see illustrated a number of the same failures shown in the Victoria Climbié case.

As Lord Laming said in the introduction to his report:

"I recognise that those who take on the work of protecting children at risk of deliberate harm face a tough and challenging task. Staff doing this work need a combination of professional skills and personal qualities, not the least of which are persistence and courage."

I agree. We should not underestimate the difficulty and sensitivity of the work undertaken by social workers, police, medical professionals and teachers. But of course when decisions and judgments are so difficult, procedures are more, not less, important. As Lord Laming said about the Victoria Climbié case:

"Even after listening to all the evidence, I remain amazed that nobody in any of the key agencies had the presence of mind to follow what are relatively straightforward procedures on how to respond to a child about whom there is concern of deliberate harm."

I agree with that too, in the case of Lauren. The investigations that I undertook on behalf of the Norfolk all-party group of MPs leave little room for doubt.

In a letter to MPs, the director of Norfolk social services, Mr. David Wright, admitted

"There were failings in other agencies but I believe that our Department should have been able to intervene to save her".

It was only after a great deal of pressure from Norfolk MPs, the public and the media that the Norfolk health authority agreed to mount an independent review of its role in Lauren's case. The review's findings were shattering. The *Eastern Daily Press* reported on 26 March 2002 that there had been

"a series of errors and poor NHS management which culminated in a failure to safeguard the little girl."

There was also the role of the education service. The Minister will want to take careful note, given her background in the Education Department. Lauren attended a 29-pupil school. She presented at school with bruising. She lost four stone in weight. She was listless and tired. Despite all that, as far as we know her teachers did not report to the education welfare service concerns that they might have had about her health, as they were required to do under local education authority guidelines. I say "as far as we know" because the Norfolk local education authority declined to make public any inquiries it might have made in the wake of Lauren's death. She was therefore failed by no fewer than four chief officers and professionals in social services, the health service and the education service, just as Victoria Climbié was failed by a multiplicity of professions.

The all-party group suggested to the Climbié inquiry that the following issues should be tackled. The first was accountability, which the Secretary of State touched on in his remarks. The Norfolk MPs concluded that a statutory duty should be placed on the chief executive of each local authority to convene the area child protection committee in cases of repeated child abuse and neglect, and that he or she should have a statutory duty to ensure that appropriate action is taken. If it is not, the chief executive should ensure that disciplinary action follows. We thought that a similar duty should also be placed on health authority chief executives. To ensure that professional staff are not unduly put at risk from that arrangement or structure, we also decided that the same chief executive should have a statutory responsibility to ensure that all staff have clear information about exactly what is expected of them in a given child abuse situation.

[Mrs. Gillian Shephard]

The group also felt that authorities should have more regard to transparency in their conduct of such matters. As Members of Parliament representing all the people of Norfolk we had difficulty in getting information out of the authorities concerned. We were greatly helped by the energies of local media and by public support, but it should not be so. Paradoxically, professionals get more blame from the public if there is less transparency about what happens in a given case. Trade unions and professional organisations understandably worry about witch hunts. Everyone can see that. The public, equally understandably, know only what the media tell them. They cannot understand why child abuse tragedies continue to occur while no one is ever seen to be blamed. We all thought that there should be more transparency and an open and public debate about responsibility and blame in society. We thought all those things important.

I add this plea. I ask the Minister to pay attention to the problems of rural isolation with respect to professional agencies. In particular, there could be a reluctance in a small rural school that is close to its community to suspect—let alone denounce—people in that community of child abuse. In such areas, there could be a series of different solutions, such as a special unit at the LEA, or even—I hesitate to suggest this because I think it is a generational point—a return to the old-fashioned role of the school nurse. If the school nurse had gone in and out of that school to examine the children regularly, professionally and objectively, Lauren Wright would not have died, because her injuries would have been uncovered. I understand that school nurses do other things now. I know that my suggestion may seem old-fashioned, but it is a practical idea that might help in future. I am grateful that last summer Ministers accepted amendments to the Education Act 2002 which, in effect, made statutory for teachers, school governors, local education authorities and further education colleges the observance of child abuse guidelines.

It is truly inexplicable that, when there is agreement among Members on both sides of the House, policy and practice changes should be urgently required to reduce an unacceptable number of child deaths. The Government themselves announced that the Green Paper would be issued in spring, but changed that to before the summer recess. However, today we are not much nearer to knowing what they have in mind. The Secretary of State, rather skilfully, I thought, said that there was a delay of one parliamentary week, but in fact it is a delay of several months on the date announced by the right hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), then Secretary of State for Health, on 28 January. The Minister for Children is a former local authority leader and has experience of these matters. I hope that she agrees that the Government should not have spent three years since the appalling death of a helpless, hapless and innocent child considering what should be done. They should not be obfuscating the reasons for the delay in their action. The hon. Lady has only just begun her important job. In the name of all the Victorias and all the Laurens, we want her to get on with it.

6.16 pm

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): I rise to defend the Government's actions on the protection of children, specifically in my capacity as chair of the all-party group on abuse investigations.

In the past five years, 35 police authorities throughout the UK have conducted more than 80 extensive inquiries into historical cases of sex abuse in care homes. Many hon. Members will know of my concerns about those inquiries, but it cannot be denied that energy, time and money that has been spent on them. I estimate that perhaps as much as £500 million has been spent investigating complaints involving thousands of cared-for young people throughout the UK in the past five years. Under the previous Administration things were not perfect, and many children living in children's homes were neglected. We need to understand what it was like then for children in care homes who were preyed on by abusive carers. Young people attempted to complain, but whether or not the complaint was acted on was at the discretion of the person they spoke to. The lack of prosecutions over a long period was indicative of the collective failure of the agencies responsible for the care of vulnerable young children.

We must be realistic and fair about the reasons for the failure of the agencies that care for children. We have already acknowledged that the vast majority of professionals working in this area do so because they are passionately concerned about the welfare of the children. However, historically, they have worked with administrations that were procedurally inadequate, and those inadequacies militated against the effective management of complaints. Significantly, there was no statutory relationship to bring the agencies working with vulnerable children together. That serious omission invariably meant that agencies receiving complaints were completely unaware of complaints made in other areas.

Those omissions were partly addressed by the Children Act 1989, but until then, a child making a complaint could have spoken to a significant number of people, none of whom were connected together administratively. Hence there was no collective understanding of the extent of abuse endured by a child. The Children Act sought to address that administrative failure, but it took years to implement. Crucially, it was introduced at a time when social services budgets stood still at best, and in many cases were being dramatically eroded. The measures detailed in the Children Act called for funding, which simply did not exist. It was all talk, and the lack of funding left the vulnerable, vulnerable.

That huge funding omission was addressed in September 1998, when nearly £1 billion—£880 million, to be precise—was invested in the quality protects programme to improve children's social services, sure start and the Connexions service. I could speak at length about those additional services, which meant a great deal to vulnerable children. Many authorities throughout the country, including my own, desperately needed the money. It was not the lack of concern in social services departments that led to complaints being ignored, but lack of funding to pay for an adequate number of appropriately trained staff who could respond comprehensively to complaints.

Cash was needed not only in social services departments, but in all the other major public sector agencies involved in child care, to allow them to support joint agency approaches and resolve complaints by children effectively. The police needed further funding, and the enormous children's fund has allowed them to do much good work. The education departments needed huge amounts of funding to employ appropriately qualified staff to work in schools. Health care providers and all the other agencies working with children received dramatic funding uplifts. The Government continue to invest substantially in those areas.

Now, when a child makes a complaint the public authorities have a duty to refer the complaint for investigation. The environment in which looked-after children live has changed radically in the past six years. The Government have passed—and, crucially, funded—a raft of legislation designed to protect vulnerable young people, including the Care Standards Act 2000, to improve the inspection and regulation of children's care services, and the Protection of Children Act 1999, which strengthened safeguards against unsuitable people working with children. The Sexual Offences Bill currently going through the House creates a new range of offences designed to offer children under 13 the maximum protection. I can also give testimony to the good work of my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) in introducing the child protection register.

The situation is still not perfect, but the system now not only reacts to complaints made by looked-after children but is proactive, recognising that many of those children may not have the confidence to make a complaint of their own volition. If the police receive a complaint from a looked-after child, they will interview that child and all the other children who have ever lived in the home, irrespective of their age—an extraordinary commitment to the vulnerable.

I was especially pleased when the Government made the decision to continue to care for children after the age of 16. The acknowledgement that children over 16 still need care was such an important and long-awaited move. They are now looked after, and I am delighted with that measure. There is still a great deal to be done, but we have introduced measures that adequately demonstrate our commitment to children and the vulnerable.

6.23 pm

Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): The House will be aware that this place legislated for the protection of animals several decades before there was legislation to protect children. It is appalling that in this day and age children are still so cruelly treated.

I welcome the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). His enlightened and principled approach was enormously heartening. It took me back to the speech by the late Lord Joseph to the Pre-School Playgroup Association on the cycle of deprivation, when many of my own thoughts about child care began. I speak as someone who for many years was chairman of a juvenile court, and I have a mental health background rather than a local government background. I have been involved in the Children's Society and, as the Register of Members' Interests shows, now spend a great deal of time trying to bring effective good managers who are committed to the cause into many of our leading charities and public services.

It is a serious matter that we have not seen more action following the Laming report. The report is, as all would expect, outstanding. Lord Laming is one of a number of extraordinarily eminent inspectors of social services. We have been well served by their contribution, including those of Sir William Utting and now Denise Platt. The contribution that they make must be heard. It is pragmatic, sensible and to the point.

What so many people forget is that dealing with child abuse is one of the most difficult things for any professional worker. If children are removed needlessly, as they were in Cleveland, social workers will receive abuse for getting the decision wrong. If children are left in a home or a children's home where they lose their lives, the social worker is all too easily blamed. Social workers, unlike doctors, are more likely to leave the front line the more experience they get, so the least qualified and least experienced people will be doing the most difficult jobs, exercising the judgment of Solomon and facing the rage of the parent or carer if anyone dare suggest that they might be injuring their child. That is no excuse, but people need to understand the enormous pressures that social workers face.

The crisis regarding child care professionals is very serious. I looked up the figures. In 1995 there were 11,500 applicants for social work places, but by 2001 that figure had fallen to 4,000. That is very serious. The subject of child abuse and neglect also suffers various fads and fashions, such as satanic abuse, and I have to say that the whole issue of politically correct behaviour is also important. We need to learn the lessons about how many of the children who are affected come from ethnic minority homes. I well remember—as will my noble Friend Baroness Howarth, from her Lambeth days—the concept that a child from an ethnic minority family should expect a different sort of chastisement from that which a child from a white family should expect. That is unacceptable in this day and age, and we must consider all the aspects of practice. I also want to mention data protection problems. Too often people are afraid to record on file that injuries are suspicious and may relate to non-accidental injury or child abuse, because the files are open. We must look very seriously at that matter.

It was my privilege to take part in the implementation of the Children Act 1989. In that regard, I pay the greatest credit to the former Lord Chancellor, Lord Mackay of Clashfern, who undertook the most detailed consultation with the different agencies in a very open spirit before implementing the legislation. The programme of training was phenomenal. In particular, it involved the judges and the legal profession, as well as social services and social workers.

I want to make two further points. This debate is about vulnerable children. It is appalling that a child a week should die as a result of injury caused by adults, but three times that number die on the roads, and many more die by taking their own lives. If we want to get our priorities straight about the problems faced by young people in our generation, child mental health is critical. I urge the Minister for Children, in her new role, to look into child mental health and at the work of Young

[Virginia Bottomley]

Minds, and to understand the suffering and pain caused to young people and the epidemic of suicide among them. The suicide rate among young men has almost doubled in the past 20 years.

I am sceptical about the nature of the hon. Lady's role, and troubled by the fact that her post is within the Department for Education and Skills. The group that nobody has mentioned today is health visitors, who have greater licence to enter a home and ask a family to remove a child's clothes than those in any other professional group. It has to be said that teachers are not the most skilled in this area. Their record on truancy and casting difficult children into sin bins, getting them out of their way so that they can teach the main cohort, does not make them the people who are naturally most alert to child abuse and neglect.

As often as not, the issue is about the relationship between social services departments and health-related departments. They are both Department of Health responsibilities. It is hard enough persuading Health Ministers to fight for the social services budget, but it is very difficult to understand how a junior Education Minister will fight for the social services and health budgets. I remain to be convinced.

There is no simple answer—and for the children whom we are talking about, cost shunting is often at the heart of the problem. They are expensive children with needy, difficult families. It does not matter whether it is the Home Office, the Department for Education and Skills, the Department of Health or a social services department that ends up funding their care—we believe in joined-up Government—but there is a cost at the local level, and we must look very carefully at how that works in practice.

I wish the Minister for Children well with her responsibilities. I cannot stress their importance strongly enough. We have to learn the lessons of this appalling latest episode. To err is human, to fail to learn is unacceptable, and to cover up is unforgivable. We have to be open and diligent in working to ensure that every child has as stable and happy an upbringing as possible.

6.30 pm

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): It is a pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley), who has tremendous experience in these matters.

This has been a serious debate because it is about serious, often sad and upsetting, issues. I commend the eloquent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who has done a great deal of work on child protection for many months. I shall not repeat all his points in the short time available, but of course I agree with every one of them.

The Secretary of State urged me to accept a cross-party consensus, so I shall begin by agreeing with the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow). I do not often agree with a Liberal. He made some good points, but, most importantly, he took up the Secretary of State's remarks about the delay in the Green Paper on children at risk. The Secretary of State says that that delay is only one parliamentary week. What ridiculous spin gone mad. Strictly speaking, we know that that is true, but it is months—many weeks—since January in the real world. Does the Secretary of State think that cruelty to children stops because the Houses of Parliament are not sitting? I do not know why the Minister for Children is laughing; it is not funny. Children continue to be at risk in the course of one parliamentary week.

I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) for her wise words. She, like my other colleagues, knows the subject well; she has been steeped in it because of the sad case in her constituency.

I commend much of the speech by the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward). His work on ChildLine has been very successful over the years. I take his point about reasonable chastisement. I undertake to consider that, but I sincerely hope that the Minister will also do so.

The Secretary of State, in urging me to accept a cross-party consensus, wants to pay homage to those who have worked on the subject in the past; I join him in doing so. I show respect for Ministers of all parties who have done something about trying to improve child protection. I have a lot of respect for the former Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), and the way in which he handled the Laming report when he presented it to this House. Indeed, I commend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for the progress that has been made so far.

The hon. Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) made the excellent point that we need to know who will be the one person who is responsible locally; we have to wait for the Green Paper to deal with that. While we are waiting, I commend Essex county council—my county—for its pioneering attitude in bringing together the departments of education and social services. We have some excellent people in Essex who will make that work.

I remain seriously concerned about the delay in the publication of the Green Paper and the consequent delay in improving services for vulnerable children. As other hon. Members said, the former Secretary of State for Health clearly stated in January that the Green Paper would be published in the spring. When it was not, the former Leader of the House assured us in good faith that it would be published before the summer recess. That was not unreasonable; things were going well, the Government were taking the necessary action and we agreed with them. However, the Prime Minister threw a spanner in works by appointing the hon. Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge) as Minister for Children.

We welcomed the creation of the post of a Minister for Children that would bring together cross-departmental functions. That was practical and good, and many hon. Members from all parties agreed with it. I believed that that new post would mean more Government attention on the issues that Lord Laming's report identified. Far from providing a focus on vulnerable children, the hon. Lady has simply provided a focus on herself and no action on the Laming report. She devised three different excuses for not publishing the Green Paper; the Secretary of State came up with even more today.

The first excuse was the Prime Minister. Two weeks ago, his official spokesman said that the Prime Minister wanted to be present at the Green Paper's launch and that he had no time in his diary to undertake such an engagement until the autumn. What is the Prime Minister doing between two weeks ago and the autumn that is more important than the protection of vulnerable children? It is extraordinarily difficult to find out. I wrote to ask him, and his office replied that his diary cannot be published for security reasons. That is fair enough but I wonder whether the reply refers to security from international terrorists or whether he would prefer that his Back Benchers did not know where to find him. The Prime Minister is probably too busy to bother about a mere Green Paper because he has to practise his Pinocchio performances in front of Commons Committees and the BBC.

Let us be fair to the Prime Minister. It is not his job to publish a Green Paper on children at risk; that is why he has a new Minister for Children. She came up with two further excuses. She says that she wants to be Minister not only for children but for young people and their families. As a sort of tsarina for everyone, she wants to expand the Green Paper's remit. That is not a good excuse. She can produce pages of glossy waffle about her politically correct ideas if she wishes, but she should deal with Lord Laming's recommendations now. We do not mind waiting until the autumn for the waffle.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Perhaps it would help hon. Members if, as well as giving us a tirade against the Minister, the hon. Lady would outline some of Her Majesty's Opposition's options, policies and priorities on the most important topic of child abuse.

Mrs. Laing: The hon. Gentleman has been absent for the debate. It has been serious, and we are tackling the issue of child abuse. *[Interruption.]* I cannot hear the hon. Gentleman; he is murmuring. We do not mind waiting until the autumn for the rest of the Minister's ideas, but we should have the Green Paper now.

The Minister's third excuse is that it is only a Green Paper or discussion document, not a statement of Government policy and therefore not urgent. However, it is not only a Green Paper. The document was promised as the Government's response to Lord Laming's report on the Victoria Climbié inquiry. Lord Laming recommended action within six months. Local authorities have done all that they can on the Laming recommendations, as far as we know. We went into that in great detail during the Secretary of State's speech. We do not know, but we believe that they have done all that they can so far. They need to know the Government's response before they can go further. Local authorities are in limbo, time is being wasted and children are at risk.

I know that the Minister has been under pressure because of her past record of failure to protect children in Islington. It was, of course, the first London borough to ban fox hunting, but it was not very good at paedophile hunting. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Whatever happens, hon. Members should not shout at the hon. Lady. She has been called to speak and she should be allowed a hearing. Sometimes insulting hon. Members is all right, provided that it is within the rules of the House.

Mrs. Laing: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not intend to insult anyone but to put before the House the facts about what is really happening. That is what we are here to do.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Laing: I do not have time to give way.

The Minister for Children said that she had learned from her mistakes, and I hoped that she had, because it is quite reasonable to do so. But the facts that have emerged in the last few weeks show that she has not. Surely the main lessons to be learned from her past must be that words are not the same as actions, and that producing politically correct speeches does not bring results. That is why she was criticised before, but she is now doing exactly the same things again.

The underlying theme of this Government is that image is more important than reality. No wonder no one can trust them. No wonder no one believes a word that they say. *[Interruption.]* I am not scoring political points. I am doing my duty, which is to hold this Government to account for their mistakes, their failures and their negligence. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members ought to get their priorities right. The duty of this House is not to protect a discredited Minister, but to protect vulnerable children.

6.41 pm

The Minister for Children (Margaret Hodge): Apart from the opening and closing speeches, we have had a lot of thoughtful contributions from both sides of the House today on this central issue of concern, which should be above party politics. The final contribution from the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) demonstrated that, to the Conservatives, children are nothing more than a convenient political tool to be exploited to narrow political advantage.

Mrs. Laing: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Hon. Members: Sit down!

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call for calm. We are about to have a recess: we should be happy. We should not be so angry with one another.

Margaret Hodge: My final comment on the speech made by the hon. Member for Epping Forest is that I agree with her that actions are more important than words. Certainly, my actions have done—and will do—more for children than her words ever could.

Let me deal with the contributions of the Back Benchers, who have said some important things. I agree with the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) and others on the importance of social workers. One of my key ambitions in my new role is to raise the status of social workers in our society. We all value teachers, police officers and doctors, but we do not give the same value and credence to those utterly key workers who do such a lot for children at the most

[Margaret Hodge]

vulnerable stages of their lives. One of the things on which we should be judged after our time in office is whether we have raised the status of social workers.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam asked specific questions about the guidance on information sharing. I can tell him that on 19 May we issued guidance on the interpretation of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998, which we sent to the chief executives of all councils, to NHS bodies, to the police and directly to all doctors and nurses. The hon. Gentleman also asked who would be taking forward the implications of the Munby judgment. That has now been transferred as part of the responsibilities of our Department, working with colleagues across government.

The hon. Gentleman also talked about the cultural change that we need to achieve if we are to be effective in putting children at the heart of the way in which we deliver services. That theme ran through a number of speeches. I agree that cultural change is absolutely imperative, not only among the professionals but in society. It will be a very tough task, and it will not be easy to achieve.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward), who made an excellent speech, on his work as deputy chairman of ChildLine. I agree that the best that our past and future actions can achieve is to make things that much better for children. It should not be thought that in such a difficult area, in which difficult judgments must be made, we can ever get it right all the time—however well people are trained, and however experienced they are in any of the spheres involved in working with children. Nevertheless, our duty and our endeavour must be to make things better.

Mr. McLoughlin: Can the Minister confirm that the only reason for the delay in the Green Paper's publication is the Prime Minister's diary?

Margaret Hodge: There is no single reason for the delay; there are several reasons, and if the hon. Gentleman will be patient I shall come to them in due course. Anyone who is concerned about children, especially vulnerable children, surely accepts that further consultation is as important as ensuring that the Prime Minister launches—

Mrs. Laing: Will the Minister give way?

Margaret Hodge: Not at this stage.

David Taylor: Could not the delay be used for reflection on more recent incidents, such as the internet seduction involving the 13-year-old from Lancashire, now happily restored to her parents? Is that not a further example of "children at risk", and an emerging vulnerability in a changing society?

Margaret Hodge: Over time we need to consider anything that happens, and things happen day by day. We need to reflect, listen and learn from every single incident that places a child at risk of abuse, or endangers that child.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South mentioned a number of issues that ChildLine wished to raise with me, some of which I believe are extremely important. I am delighted to be meeting Esther Rantzen next week to discuss several of them, and I should be happy to meet my hon. Friend and others as well.

The right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) gave a harrowing description of the errors and muddles that led to the tragic death of Lauren Wright in her constituency. She said that judgments were difficult, so procedures were important. I agree with that, but I hope that she agrees that procedures will not make a difference unless they are accompanied by a range of measures, such as the training of all who will have an impact on children's lives. Account should be taken of common assessments and the tracking of information. Procedures are important, but we need to do far more to strengthen the infrastructure in which we can then protect children and young people.

Mrs. Shephard: Surely the Minister agrees that in the case of Lauren Wright, and indeed in the case of Victoria Climbié and many others, ignoring and disregarding procedures proved fatal. That was my point, that is why the Green Paper is important—I hope it will emphasise the need for new procedures—and that is what we want the Government to accept this evening.

Margaret Hodge: I agree with the right hon. Lady that procedures are important. I hope that she agrees that the legislative framework established by her party in the Children Act 1989 specified a number of procedures on which we now need to build.

I pay tribute to the work done by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) as chair of the all-party group on abuse investigations. She said a great deal about information sharing, which I too consider important. She also acknowledged the money that we have provided to support children and prevent them from being subjected to abuse or danger, through quality projects, sure start, Connexions and the children fund—as well as the extra money that we have provided for mainstream education services, the police and the Youth Justice Board.

The right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) stressed the importance of the social work profession, and I agree with her on that. She talked about work force problems, and I share her concern. We need massive reform of how we recruit, train and retain people to work in the range of childcare professions. The right hon. Lady also questioned whether locating the joined-up services in the Department for Education and Skills was appropriate. If we are trying to build stronger preventive services so that we can target the appropriate action to protect children, it is important to put those services in a Department that provides a universal service to all our children and young people. The trick that we shall have to perform—the right hon. Lady will need to watch us on it—is that as we bring together all the professions that work with children, we must value the contribution of each and ensure that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts in its impact on children's lives.

The central contention in the motion tabled by the Opposition is plain wrong. It is simply not the case that the action that we need to take to implement many of the recommendations put forward by Lord Laming in his thorough and comprehensive inquiry has to await the publication of our Green Paper. Indeed, it is unbelievable and unimaginable to suggest that we would not want to make progress as soon as we could in every direction possible.

Tim Loughton *rose—*

Mrs. Laing: Will the Minister give way?

Margaret Hodge: No. Every year—*[Interruption.]* Every year, between 50 and 100 children are killed by their parents or carers—

Tim Loughton: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Margaret Hodge: No, I want to make some progress. The names of children such as Darren Clark, who died in 1979, Maria Colwell, Jasmine Beckford, Kimberly Carlile, Paul Brown, Tyra Henry and Lauren Wright will always be embedded in our minds. The horrific life endured by eight-year-old Victoria Climbié when she came to England stands as an indictment on us all. We must all do all that we can, as soon as we can, to put in place the structures, policies, programmes and people that will ensure that every child in our society is safe and protected from the dangers of abuse and injury—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is not giving way. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] I do not know why.

Margaret Hodge: Of course we have taken action to implement the recommendations of the Laming inquiry. Indeed, on the very day that the then Secretary of State got up in the House to present the report of the inquiry, action had already started. For instance, the Metropolitan police began restructuring its child protection services. On the very day that we published Lord Laming's report, we issued a checklist of those recommendations that we considered to be basic good practice. Since then, we have published the booklet for professionals, "What To Do If You're Worried A Child Is Being Abused", to simplify the procedures for people. We are reviewing training needs and we have increased resources for social work. We have introduced a new three-year social work degree. We have run a national recruitment campaign, and the number of applications to become a social worker has risen by 6.5 per cent.

Tim Loughton: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way at last. We are impressed by the number of checklists, booklet and reviews, but that does not constitute action. We still have no idea of how we can audit what action has been taken by bodies on the ground.

Margaret Hodge: I dispute the contention by the hon. Gentleman that the actions we have taken are not action. Of 108 recommendations in Lord Laming's report, 83 have been fully or partly addressed. The implied allegation in the Opposition motion that delayed publication of the Green Paper would stop us acting to protect children is plain wrong.

The Green Paper will contain further far-reaching proposals to continue and develop our programme of reform for children's services. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has done a superb job, together with other Ministers, in formulating the strategy for the future. I, for my part, am proud that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is so committed to this issue that he has insisted on personally launching the Green Paper. This is unequivocally good news for children.

I am also pleased that I can use the extra time that we have to consult even more widely with, and listen even more carefully to, those at the front line who have the day-to-day experience of working with children. We shall put forward proposals that strongly reflect our vision and values for children and young people. They are that every child matters, and that every child must have the opportunity to fulfil his or her potential. We cannot allow children's life chances to be blighted by the age of five because of where they live or where they came from, and every child must be properly protected so that they are safe.

Tim Loughton *rose—*

Margaret Hodge: In addition, we believe that no child should be denied the chance to make the most of his or her life.

Those are the values that underpin my approach and that will inform our policies. They are the values on which we shall build a coalition of support so that every child can grow up healthy, safe and fulfilled.

This is a really serious issue, and every hon. Member should engage seriously with the issues involved. I want to work with everybody on these difficult issues. They should be above party politics.

I wish that I could be grateful that the Conservatives had recognised how key child protection is and that it was this recognition that had led them to have the debate this afternoon. But no: this debate was put on the Order Paper not because of the Conservative party's interest in children's issues, but because of Conservative Members' crude pursuit of party politics—*[Interruption.]*

Mrs. Laing: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I take the point of order, I inform the House that I am chairing the proceedings. I tell hon. Members when to sit down, and I do it rather nicely.

Mrs. Laing: My point of order is that the reason that Opposition called the debate is stated clearly in the motion. It is because we care about children. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The debate was well within the rules. That is why I allowed the motion to go on the Order Paper.

Margaret Hodge: It is not children who are at the heart of the Conservatives' concern. It is shoddy opportunism.

Where was the Conservative party in the 1980s and 1990s, when local authorities were pleading for proper resourcing? *[Interruption.]*

Tim Loughton *rose—*

Hon. Members: Sit down!

Mr. Speaker: Order. Once again I ask for calmness. There is no need for this shouting across the Chamber.

Margaret Hodge: Where were the Tories when beleaguered social workers—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say again that there is no point in shouting across the Chamber.

Margaret Hodge: Where were the Tories—

DAVID MACLEAN rose in his place and claimed to move, That the Question be now put, but MR. SPEAKER withheld his assent, and declined then to put that Question.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 179, Noes 316.

Division No. 295] **[6:59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Watkinson and Mr. Mark Field

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David

Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kelvin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony

Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes: Jim Fitzpatrick and Joan Ryan

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 300, Noes 168.

Division No. 296] **[7:16 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*

Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and Ms Bridget Prentice

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Angela Watkinson and Mr. Mark Field

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's commitment to children's services as evidenced by the appointment of the Minister of State for Children; congratulates the Government on its Quality Protects initiative, which provided £885 million to improve children's social services; supports the action the Government is taking to legislate to establish an independent inspectorate to inspect local authority children's services and social care provided by the private and voluntary sector; notes that the Government, local authorities and other statutory bodies are already taking further action to improve services for children, in the light of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report; congratulates the Government and local services on the announcement of the 35 Children's Trusts Pathfinders on 10th July; and looks forward to the publication of the Green Paper on children in the autumn.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE (ENGLAND)

That the Special Grant Report (No. 125) (HC 776) on the Preserved Rights Grant for 2003–04, dated 16th June 2003, a copy of which was laid before this House on 16th June, be approved.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Mr. Speaker: I think the Ayes have it.

Hon. Members: No.

Division deferred till Wednesday 10 September, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002]

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE (ENGLAND)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the Special Grant Report (No. 124) (HC 777) on the Delayed Discharges Grant for 2003–04, dated 16th June 2003, a copy of which was laid before this House on 16th June, be approved.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Mr. Speaker: I think the Ayes have it.

Hon. Members: No.

Division deferred till Wednesday 10 September, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002].

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You must have been almost embarrassed to have announced that to the House. Is not this the ultimate illustration of the absurdity of deferred Divisions? Here we have a motion before the House which we have objected to, and you have now told us that Members of the House will have to wait until 10 September to write down their vote on a ballot paper, in a Division Lobby, conveniently immediately after Prime Minister's questions, and that is when the matter will be resolved. History will record that this was the ultimate absurdity of deferred Divisions.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman is aware of the Standing Orders of the House.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6)(Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE (ENGLAND)

That the Special Grant Report (No. 123) (HC 778) on the Social Services (High Performers No. 2) Grant for 2003–04, dated 16th June 2003, a copy of which was laid before this House on 16th June, be approved.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Mr. Speaker: I think the Ayes have it.

Hon. Members: No.

Division deferred till Wednesday10 September, pursuant to Orders [June 28 2001 and 29 October 2002].

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We debated those three motions Upstairs in Committee this week. However, you have informed the House, because of Standing Orders over which you have no control, that we cannot determine them until some time in September, as my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House said. Is that not ridiculous? It also shows the Government's contempt for the House.

There is a motion on the Order Paper not to defer a Division, because that might have been convenient for the Government. However, as dividing on the motion would have kept Labour Members here for a short time to vote, they were not prepared to waive the deferred Division. Do you think that that should go to the Procedure Committee for consideration?

Mr. Speaker: I would not get involved in how the Government conduct themselves. However, there is nothing to stop the hon. Gentleman writing to the Procedure Committee on that matter.

PETITIONS

Pharmacy Services

7.33 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): The petition "Save our Pharmacy Services", which I have the honour to present, is signed by 2,000 petitioners.

The petition declares:

That the proposals made by the Office of Fair Trading allowing the unrestricted opening of pharmacies able to dispense NHS prescriptions will precipitate chaotic changes to the distribution of pharmaceutical services; lead to less convenient access for many patients, particular the elderly and those without transport and have a detrimental impact on the contribution made to primary care services by community pharmacies.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to reject the proposals made by the OFT for the unrestricted opening of pharmacies.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Fair Trade

7.34 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I wish to present a petition on behalf of several hundred of my constituents from the towns of Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard, Houghton Regis and the surrounding villages concerning fair and free trade for the less developed world.

The petition states:

To the House of Commons

The Petition of the constituents of South West Bedfordshire states that fairer trade rules are needed to increase what the poor can earn for themselves through trade.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons encourage the Government, as the UK prepares for September's World Trade Organisation ministerial meeting in Mexico, to ask that they ensure that the UK Government supports the demands of the Trade Justice Movement.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Accident Group

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

7.35 pm

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): First, may I say what an honour it is, Mr. Speaker, that you should choose to remain in the Chair for this Adjournment debate? May I take the opportunity to wish you and your wife a pleasant and relaxing summer break from your arduous duties?

I wish to raise the issue of the Accident Group, a personal injury firm that collapsed overnight on 30 May, sacking 2,700 people, many of whom were told by text message. The majority were left without salaries, and huge questions remain to be answered about the way in which the firm functioned. Why did directors continue to spend frivolously when they knew that the firm was in serious financial difficulty? It owed six months' national insurance payments. Why was there a deliberate board-level change in policy last year, which meant that the firm held on to millions of pounds that should have been paid back to the banks? Why did the company's sales reps deliberately target vulnerable, poverty-stricken people and entice them to fabricate claims, knowing that they were false? Why as yet is there no regulation of these so-called claims farmers, and why has no investigation been launched by the Department of Trade and Industry?

The Accident Group, which is known by the acronym TAG, was started by Mr. Mark Langford as a small personal injury claims firm in 1993. In 1999, after the Access to Justice Act 1999 created a market following the loss of legal aid, the company took off. In the new era of no win, no fee, TAG was responsible for the catch phrase, "Where there's blame, there's a claim," and stormed on to the scene, conquering 25 per cent. of the personal injury market in less than two years. The company claimed to be one of the fastest growing UK businesses, and reported an increase in turnover of 179 per cent. last year to £243 million. Based in Manchester, and part of the Amulet Group, the firm worked by asking the claimant to take out a bank loan to pay for a post-event insurance policy. That bank loan would pay for TAG's fees, and would be paid back to the bank from the damages won by the claimant in a case—at least that was the theory.

If the claimant lost the case, the insurance policy would pay out, and the loan would be paid back anyway, leading the claimant to walk away and pay nothing—hence the claim, "No win, no fee". Claimants were sought by telesales, door-to-door canvassing, secondary selling—a claimant would be asked if they had a relative or friend who wanted to claim, or whether they wanted to make another claim themselves—and television and radio advertising. Teams of salesman even used to trawl for claimants on the streets in the centre of my own city of Liverpool. As well as a basic salary of £1,300 a calendar month, reps were paid £50 a claim for 33 per cent. of the claims that they wrote up. Until last August, that commission was paid regardless of whether a case was taken up or not. A salesman would find a claimant and get them to sign a form stating the nature of the injury and the cause of the accident. The details would then go back to the office, where another part of the company called Accident Investigations Ltd., or AIL, would investigate the claim further to see if it had a chance of winning. Once AIL had decided to go ahead with the claim, it would be activated—a credit agreement would be signed by the claimant who would take out a bank loan from the Royal Bank of Scotland, which would cover TAG's £995 fees, AIL's £320 investigation fee, any medical fees—on average, about about £400—and other disbursements.

Once the loan had been taken out, the case would be passed to an independent vetting firm of solicitors, a Manchester-based firm called Rowe Cohen. The firm would in turn pass the case to one of a panel of 600 or 700 solicitors for a vetting fee of about £50 plus VAT. That solicitor would then take the case on for the claimant and deal directly with him or her. If the case succeeded in court or was settled for an agreed amount, the bank loan and the solicitor's fees would be paid out of the damages and the claimant would get whatever was left—in many cases, not very much. If the case failed after a court hearing, the insurance policy would pay out and the fees of all those involved in the case except the solicitors would be paid, and the bank loan would be paid back from that.

Sometimes claimants could not be contacted by the solicitor, or would not want to go ahead with the case, or it was found that the amount winnable in damages would not cover the costs of taking the case, or that the case was fraudulent. In an agreement drawn up between TAG, the insurance underwriters and the banks, if that happened after the loan had been activated and the case was less than nine months old and had had less than £55 of disbursements spent on it, it could be voided. That meant that TAG would pay back its £999 fee, AIL would pay back its £320 fee, the insurance company would pay back its premium, and the entire bank loan would be paid back as though nothing had ever happened. Everyone would go back to zero and the case would be binned. Seemingly, everyone was a winner, or at least not a loser.

However, I must give credit to BBC Radio—a much-maligned part of our media, but I have great respect for it, and for no programme more than "You and Yours", which investigated the company and revealed several anomalies. Panel firms of solicitors would pay, as I said, £50 to take on a case on the basis of information provided by TAG, yet once taken on, the standard of cases passing through the vetting solicitors Rowe Cohen was found to be so bad that one panel firm said to the programme's researchers that out of 1,200 cases offered by TAG, only 150 were of sufficient standard to be pursued. The rest were exaggerated, embellished or simply fraudulent. That raises serious questions about the effectiveness of the procedures of Rowe Cohen.

TAG sales representatives were told to get four claims a day, but because of the commission basis were encouraged to get as many as they could. Sources in the company revealed that as the company grew, the reps became less and less concerned with the validity of the claims, and in numerous cases not only knew the claims to be fraudulent, but set up the situation for the fraudulent claims to be made. I emphasise that not all TAG sales reps were unscrupulous—not at all. Indeed, some claim that they raised their concerns about methods with the company, but were ignored.

[Mr. Peter Kilfoyle]

We must be aware of the structure above the reps. Managing the sales rep was a supervisor. Above him or her was a first line manager, then an area manager, then a regional manager, then a divisional manager, and ultimately the cost centre manager. They were all paid commission on a sliding scaled based on the reps' performance at the bottom of the heap. It was like an inverted form of pyramid selling. Some reps would knock on doors after a bus crash and recruit claimants by getting them to sign forms and filling in the details later.

One man said that a visit from a TAG rep resulted in a claim for industrial deafness while working at the Ford Motor Company, another claim for vibration white finger caused by operating a kango hammer while working for Cruden, and a third claim for injuries after being involved in a bus crash, but the man remarked that he had never worked for Ford or Cruden, and had never travelled on a crashing bus. The rep had told him—a vulnerable single father of four—that he would get his money anyway. I should point out that Arriva and two other bus companies are investigating 400 such allegedly fraudulent claims.

Other reps would wait for vulnerable people outside jobcentres, then lead them round a corner before talking them into claiming that they had tripped over a paving stone, conveniently photographing them at the scene as part of the claim. One rep would use a series of five potholes successively, enticing cars full of passengers to them, then persuading the driver to claim, falsely, that he had driven over the pothole. The driver and passengers would all be written up for non-existent whiplash injuries.

Cleaners were the easiest, one rep said, because any woman who worked as a cleaner could be convinced that she had a work-related injury. People working as security guards and office workers were also easily persuaded. Effectively, anybody who worked could fall into the scam. One lady alleged that she had been approached in the street and that a fraudulent claim was written up in her name despite her asking otherwise—and the rep still received the commission.

One of the reps has gone on record as saying that he used to stand outside Liverpool prison in my constituency waiting for prisoners to be released, after which he would talk them into claiming that they had a bad back that had been caused by sleeping on lumpy mattresses. I did not know that it was possible to sue the Prison Service for that. Hundreds of such claims went through the system. No claims ever reached the prison, but the point is that the reps were paid their commission. The rep also talked about persuading a woman who broke her leg on an ice rink to sue on the basis that the signs saying "Danger—Slippery Surface" were not visible enough. It was not seen as relevant that the woman was wearing ice skates at the time.

Much of the documentation that has become available reveals that a large number of claims submitted to the company were false and known to be so by the reps. However, until last August, when the rules changed, they retained their commission. The reps' explanation is simple. They were under enormous pressure from the company to hit claims targets. They say that four claims a day was their standard target. As I mentioned, when a case was no longer active, it could be voided and the moneys taken out and paid back. On average, in 2001–02, 15,000 cases a month were activated. Loan amounts could vary, but they included that standard fee of £995 for TAG and £320 for AIL. A loan of about £1,500 was the norm.

For months, out of 15,000 cases activated in a month, 2,500 to 3,000 cases were voided—a rate of about 13 or 15 per cent. Consequently, the moneys were paid back. For TAG alone, the total would be £2.5 million to £3 million a month, and for AIL, which was wholly owned by TAG, it would equal about another £1 million. That was quite normal in the business.

In December 2002, that rate dropped overnight to 300 voided cases a month. That meant that only £300,000 was being paid back to the bank. The figures show that that went on for some time. Indeed, it continued from December 2002 until about the following April, when the number of voided cases suddenly leapt back up to 2,900. I am told that that came out of a row between a TAG director, Maria Berry, and Anthony Denison of Rowe Cohen, which made it clear that there was a problem for the company. In May 2003, the figure dropped back to 258.

Then came the magical date of 30 May this year. There had been a deliberate change in policy at boardroom level, which meant that staff were being ordered not to void cases, as keeping cases alive for longer meant that the money would not have to be paid back to the bank, despite the company knowing that the case was dead. If the case was kept alive for longer than nine months, according to the agreement drawn up between the banks, TAG and the underwriters, when it failed, the underwriters would have to pay out on the insurance policy to refund the bank loan. That meant that TAG would keep the money from the bank loan.

When the void rates dropped, staff questioned what was going on and were told by the directors, "Needs must: this is the way in which we must proceed." On the day before the company went into administration, one staff member was told to void 9,000 cases in one day. However, as the firm's accounts were frozen the very next morning, it still is not known, as far as I am aware, whether the money—approximately £9 million—was paid back to the bank.

Last autumn, the new insurance underwriters insisted that the rules should change. That meant that sales reps were paid only when a case was activated, which improved the quality of the cases taken on. However, it was too late, as the cases written up in 2001–02 had done serious damage to the company. So many cases had failed and the insurance premiums were increasing at such a rate that TAG's fees could not cover them. The outcome was inevitable.

Two meetings of TAG workers were held in Manchester and Liverpool. I mention this point en passant, as I think that it is important that we get it on record, as 2,700 people lost their jobs. It emerged that former members of staff were having difficulty in claiming jobseeker's allowance and were being told by jobcentres that not enough class 1 national insurance payments had been made on their behalf. Examination of wage slips showed that national insurance had been taken from salaries, and sources within the company

confirmed that no national insurance payments had been made to the Contributions Agency after December.

It is important to note that the Inland Revenue says that payment of tax can be deferred, with agreement, but the Contributions Agency says that national insurance "cannot under any circumstances" be deferred. Further inquiries revealed that TAG owes a grand total of £11.1 million in national insurance. I may be mistaken, but I believe that the directors of the company will be personally liable for that money. Remember, too, that the workers will be out of pocket. Not only have they lost their jobs and salaries, but for much of 2003 even the promised commission has not materialised. On 30 May, most of the work force were alerted that their May salaries would not be paid. Some were e-mailed; many were texted. What a way to lose a job in the 21st century.

The last national insurance contributions were paid in December 2002, but the directors of the company continued to spend. Sources within the accounts department say that £420,000 was spent on a Christmas party for the staff that month. The directors went to Barbados with their families at a cost of £42,000. In March, a number of directors went to Barcelona to watch Manchester United play—on the company, of course—and in April the firm spent £70,000 on a new public address system to pipe soft music around the buildings. The executive car fleet contained one £225,000 Bentley, two Ferraris, one Aston Martin V8 Vantage, one £54,000 Range Rover, a Mercedes SLK and, for the poor relations, a Beetle for their exclusive use.

Former accounts staff say that directors were warned repeatedly that they were spending too much, but those warnings were ignored. The staff believe that the company was being mismanaged and trading improperly. Certainly, evidence from former workers suggests that the directors knew that the firm was in serious financial difficulty, yet continued to spend. At the beginning of 2003—lo and behold—the directors began to buy their own cars from the company; it would be interesting to know if that was at a very reduced rate. Staff were told to sit on invoices and not to pay anyone until at least three letters of complaint were received, or the creditor went as far as threatening a county court judgment. Mysteriously, bits of furniture started to be removed without warning or explanation, and problems over unpaid commission began to emerge.

The Accident Group went down owing millions of pounds. PricewaterhouseCoopers, the firm of administrators, is trying to untangle the mess. There are still approximately 250,000 ongoing cases, some of which are undoubtedly fraudulent, but many of which are genuine. They have been taken up by a firm called Lawcall. The Department of Trade and Industry has said that it is in touch with the administrators, that it will consider the merits of an investigation based on the information that it receives, and that the administrators have agreed to send it a copy of their report once it is complete. Meanwhile, Mr. Langford still retains assets in excess of £40 million, including a £3.5 million home in Cheshire. The sad outcome of the story is that there is still no regulation for claims farmers such as the Accident Group.

I should like the Minister to respond to one or two brief questions. Is there any way in which the DTI or its sister Departments can help those employees? Will the directors be held to account? Given the advice that employees receive in Europe, can he confirm that there, this could not have happened without dialogue, notification or consultation with the work force? Are the Government thinking along the lines of providing an appropriate regulatory regime for claims farmers to pre-empt the chances of such a travesty ever happening again?

7.54 pm

Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) on raising this subject. It is an enormous scandal for a company to operate, and cease to operate, in such a way. The company was based in my constituency and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer), who also took an interest in pursuing the issues.

We must establish whether the company deliberately chose to withhold national insurance payments. That is tantamount to fraud. If that genuinely happened, we should ask serious questions about whether criminal proceedings are possible against those responsible, because they have robbed their employees. It is as simple and crude as that.

When the company went down, I asked officials in the Department of Trade and Industry to take a close interest in the matter. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can say exactly how the Department has stewarded the process. It is important to note that PricewaterhouseCoopers, the receivers in the case, have asked for the industrial tribunal process to be deferred. That may be in the interests of the receivers and the asset base, but it is not in the interests of the employees. Will my hon. Friend look into that to ensure that the employees are given every protection? They have received no protection or consideration from the company.

7.56 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe): I begin by expressing my good wishes for your recess, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that it will be a well-earned rest.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) on securing the debate. I thank him for detailing the circumstances that surrounded the announcement of the redundancy of the former employees of the Accident Group, and the company's operation. I appreciate the significance of the closure for Liverpool, Walton, where First Advance Ltd., part of the group, was based. I also acknowledge the anxieties of my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford—I am sorry, I mean my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Tony Lloyd); the reference to Manchester United threw me. I acknowledge his anxieties about the redundancies. I shall endeavour to answer the points that have been made, but the issues are serious and I want to respond to some of them in due course. I hope that my hon. Friends accept my sincerity.

I have every sympathy with the staff who worked for the companies in the Accident Group and lost their jobs. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton

[Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe]

said, it appears that news of the administration order and the likely loss of jobs was sent by text messages and e-mails to staff before the appointment of the administrators. They planned to hold meetings at the various work sites to let staff know what was happening. However, probably as a consequence of the text messages and the e-mails, few employees turned up for work. Several members of staff received notice of the proceedings through a voicemail message, which had been prepared for those who were off site and not expected in the office.

It is regrettable that staff did not receive information at the planned meetings, at which they would also have been given information about their redundancy. Whenever redundancies have to be made, it is in everyone's interests that they be handled sensitively. Too often we hear of employees discovering out of the blue—sometimes even over the radio—that they are to be dismissed. People deserve better treatment.

However, as my hon. Friend said, the administrators wrote to the staff on 30 May 2003, the day of their appointment, to explain about the administration order, the need for the redundancies and the statutory assistance available to employees from the redundancy payments section of the Insolvency Service.

My hon. Friend asked what the Government were doing for the former employees of the Accident Group. Former workers may be eligible for payments of unpaid wages, holiday pay, payment in lieu of notice and redundancy pay from the national insurance fund. All those payments are subject to statutory limits. I assure hon. Members that the redundancy payments office in Birmingham is working hard to ensure that all workers receive the full statutory amount to which they are entitled as speedily as possible. Claim forms have been issued to former employees, and most have been returned to the Birmingham redundancy payments office via the administrators.

The administrators have provided details of the group and confirmation and information about all individual former employees. By last weekend more than 1,000 employees should have received their payments. The Birmingham office aims to arrange payment for a similar number this week.

I appreciate that the limits on payments in the statute generally mean that payments do not fully cover the total amount that employees are owed by their former employers. However, my hon. Friend may be pleased to note that this Government have regularly reviewed and increased the statutory limits, most recently in February this year to £260 a week for a maximum of eight weeks. There might be some staff who have not yet lodged a claim with the redundancy payments office. Detailed information about who is entitled to payments and what and how much they are likely to be entitled to can be found on the Insolvency Service website at www.insolvency.gov.uk under "Information about redundancy matters". Alternatively, anyone who has been made redundant and needs advice or information about their entitlements or their claim can phone the redundancy payments telephone helpline on 0845 145 0004. All calls to the helpline are charged at local rates.

The administrators have a duty under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 to report to the Secretary of State on the conduct of the company's directors. The report is due approximately six months after the date of the insolvency. The Secretary of State then has a discretionary power to apply to the court for a disqualification order to be made against some or all of the directors. If such an order were to be obtained, it would run for between two and 15 years, and contravention can result not only in criminal sanctions but in the director becoming personally liable for the debts of any new company to which they are subsequently appointed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton raised a point about Europe. Looking further ahead, last week we announced proposals for implementing the information and consultation directive. This is designed to promote ongoing dialogue with employees on business issues that affect them. I am pleased that we were able to agree with the CBI and the TUC a framework for implementing the directive in the UK. We hope that the new legislation will help to deliver a "no surprises" culture that will benefit not only employees but the businesses for which they work. My hon. Friend is right to say that implementation of the directive would mean that such a case could no longer arise.

I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about the activities of the Accident Group and related companies, and that there have been calls for a code of conduct for that type of business. The Government are aware of the concerns about the activities of such companies, especially in relation to some companies' marketing methods. However, provided that they and similar intermediaries act responsibly and with probity, they can expand access for people with good claims, and provide helpful claims management services to solicitors.

Any improper, misleading or dishonest conduct towards consumers—or, indeed, in respect of any other aspect of a company's business—would of course be of great concern. The marketing and sales activities need to be performed to the highest possible standards. The maximum effort needs to be made to ensure that consumers understand the nature of any agreement that they might be asked to enter into, what liabilities they might have under that agreement, and what, if anything, it will cost them.

The Department for Constitutional Affairs is working with a range of organisations including the Law Society, the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers, the General Insurance Standards Council, consumer groups and other organisations, including claims management companies, to encourage high and common standards in accident compensation, including a voluntary code of practice. There is already considerable activity in the personal injury industry to improve and set standards and to draw up codes of practice for intermediaries. There are a number of initiatives at various stages of development, demonstrating the clear desire on the part of most intermediaries to bring about a step change in behaviour.

The Government favour a voluntary approach and a degree of industry self-regulation, rather than new formal regulation. There is already regulation of most elements in the package of legal and financial services

provided by claims management companies—for example, by the Law Society, the General Council of the Bar, the General Insurance Standards Council and, from 2005, the Financial Services Authority. However, it is clear that there is a regulatory maze in relation to legal services, and the Department for Constitutional Affairs has already announced plans to review the legal services regulatory framework. The scope of this review and the mechanism for carrying it forward will be announced in the summer.

Job losses are always a matter of great regret, and the Government were sorry to learn of the closure of the Accident Group. It is particularly unfortunate when redundancies occur suddenly and without prior consultation. Our proposals for implementing the information and consultation directive will do much to help to end that sort of business culture. However, as I have explained to the House, a range of measures both practical and legislative are in place to assist employees who are made redundant. They cannot, of course, completely make up for employees' loss of a job through no fault of their own. However, I am satisfied that those measures represent an appropriate response by the Government to what is bound to be a regrettable situation for all those concerned.

I undertake to look at all the issues that have arisen from the closure of the company, and at all the surrounding issues that need to be dealt with. I shall get back to my hon. Friend in due course, and I shall meet him when I can, to ensure that such an occurrence does not happen again.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes past Eight o'clock.

Deferred Divisions

IMMIGRATION

That the draft Asylum (Designated States) (No. 2) Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 17 June, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 376, Noes 52.

Division No. 292]

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Douglas
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blair, rh Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brown, rh Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burt, Alistair
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Clappison, James
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Conway, Derek
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, rh David
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl

Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gummer, rh John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Maples, John
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Portillo, rh Michael
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Redwood, rh John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Sheridan, Jim
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walter, Robert
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Young, rh Sir George

NOES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
McDonnell, John

Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stunell, Andrew
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Question accordingly agreed to.

Social Security

That the draft Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews for Partners) Regulations 2003, which were laid before this House on 25th June, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 270, Noes 52.

Division No. 293]

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blair, rh Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, rh Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Colman, Tony
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
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Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
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Prescott, rh John
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Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shepherd, Richard
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry

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Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

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Breed, Colin
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Burnett, John
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Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
McDonnell, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stunell, Andrew
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Question accordingly agreed to.

House of Commons

Thursday 17 July 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

DOUBLE TAXATION RELIEF

THE VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received your Addresses praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Canada) Order 2003, and the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Mauritius) Order 2003 be made in the form of the drafts laid before your House on 18 June 2003.

I will comply with your request.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Common Agricultural Policy

1. **Mr. Nicholas Brown** (Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend): What assessment she has made of the prospects for reform of the common agricultural policy *(a)* sugar and *(b)* rice regimes. [126277]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): Following the very successful outcome of last month's CAP reform negotiations in Luxembourg, which included agreement on a new rice regime, we are awaiting the promised Commission review of the sugar regime.

Mr. Brown: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, Mr. Andy Lebrecht and the agricultural specialists in my right hon. Friend's Department deserve our congratulations on their achievements in the latest CAP reform round. Congratulations are also due to Commissioner Fischler and his team of officials, who held out for a fair and rational approach to reform. However, as my right hon. Friend will know, more remains to be done, especially on the sugar and rice regimes. The current sugar regime, which is a protectionist regime that relies on exports and refunds, and passes the cost of the regime on to the consumer, is indefensible. May I urge my right hon. Friend not to give up on the United Kingdom's endeavour to have that iniquitous regime reformed?

Margaret Beckett: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I will pass on his remarks to our officials. I share his view that this is a major achievement for Commissioner Fischler, without whose determination the scale of reform would not have been achieved.

Our capacity to get agreement and to negotiate in the Agriculture Council is much assisted by the respect and affection that my right hon. Friend engendered and the relationships that he built, on which foundation we were able to build. He is right to say that reform of the sugar regime remains an important priority. We anticipate that Commissioner Fischler will come forward with further proposals, perhaps in September. I share my right hon. Friend's view, as, I hope, does the whole House, that that regime is in great need of reform. I would go so far as to say that although it will not be an easy process, and it is one beset by complications and difficulties, the question should be when the sugar regime is reformed, and not if.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does the Secretary of State agree that what is distinctive about the sugar regime is not merely its importance for developing country exporters but that the resistance to reform does not come only from the usual suspects in France but from powerful grower and processor interests in the United Kingdom? What assurances can the right hon. Lady give us that she is willing to take on those domestic vested interests in order to open markets?

Margaret Beckett: Precedent.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated on the progress that has been made in CAP reform. We know full well about the difficulties that arise in such negotiations, but is she aware of the desire that the new sugar regime should be brought in as quickly as possible? For those of us who have an interest in the developing world, every day of delay is a disaster for individual farmers and their families. Can she assure the House that she will pursue the matter as quickly as possible? As I have said, every day that passes is a disaster for individuals throughout the world.

Margaret Beckett: I know that my hon. Friend takes a great interest in these issues. He is entirely right that the present regime is very damaging. The present European Union price is about three to four times that at world level. He is also right that the regime itself distorts international trade. As the European Union has reached the everything but arms agreement, the end to this issue is bound to come. It is a matter of how we best and most speedily manage the transition. I can assure my hon. Friend that we are strong advocates of reform in that cause.

Waste Management (Essex)

2. **Bob Russell** (Colchester): If she will make representations to Essex county council to encourage it to exclude incineration as an option in the county waste management plan. [126278]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): County waste management plans are a matter for the relevant county. It is for it to decide, following consultation, what options to include in line with the waste hierarchy and the best practicable environmental option as set out in Waste Strategy 2000.

Bob Russell: The Minister will not be surprised to be told that that is the usual answer that we are given. I pay tribute to his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher), for being the best friend that the environmental lobby had—some would say the only friend—in this Government. He was of the view that there is no legal requirement on Essex county council to include incineration in its waste plan. Unfortunately, the Conservative-controlled county council claims that there is. Given the confusion, would the Minister come to county hall, Chelmsford and explain exactly why the scheme is necessary, as his predecessor accepted a similar invitation to do ~~just~~ that?

Mr. Morley: I must say that I did not notice that in the diary, but of course I will look at that invitation and treat it with respect. I emphasise to the hon. Gentleman that the green lobby is not friendless in the Government. As for whether there is a legal requirement to include incineration in the waste plan, the answer is that there is not. It is something for the waste authorities to look at in relation to the disposal hierarchy, at the top of which is waste minimisation. In some circumstances, there may be a case for some form of incineration or thermal treatment—incineration is not the only option. However, the choice of the most appropriate disposal and the most appropriate technology for dealing with waste is a local one.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): May I tell the Minister that if he is going to Chelmsford, he will not get there without going through Thurrock, where we can show him the wholly unacceptable effects of decades of landfill? All those wretched barges that go past the House are heading to Thurrock with London's waste. The message that I want to give the Minister is that waste must be disposed of in the place where it is produced, not in my backyard or that of my constituents. While I am sympathetic to the point made by the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell), anything is better than landfill—the polluter must always pay.

Mr. Morley: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend who makes a persuasive case for going to Thurrock as well.

In the hierarchy of disposal, landfill is at the very bottom, and should be the last resort. We strongly support the proximity principle of dealing with waste as near as possible to the place where it is generated. However, the key is that there must be a clear policy across the country, and local authorities need to play their part in reducing the amount of waste going to landfill. Central Government will play their part through the implementation of waste programmes, including the waste resources action programme. However, this is about meeting those targets, minimising waste and reducing the amount going to landfill.

Mr. Speaker: Jerry Wiggin.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Thank you Mr. Speaker, on behalf of myself and the rest of my family—I feel very welcome.

I have just spoken to Essex county council, and the Minister will be interested to know that it neither promotes nor excludes incineration. I can understand why incineration is such a contentious subject in Essex—nobody wants an incinerator in their backyard. Thanks to the fallen stock directive, there will 200,000 tonnes of fallen stock to incinerate, including 1.3 million adult animals, 2.6 million immature ones, and 36 million poultry. Should not the Minister insist on energy recovery from incineration, which might have a better and more important impact on our environment than the fallen stock directive?

Mr. Morley: First, may I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new role on the Opposition Front Bench? I certainly look forward to his contributions in future.

Incineration is not the only option for dealing with fallen stock, as rendering is another important method. On the serious point that the hon. Gentleman made about incineration, I should say that, occasionally, there may well be a role for it. The UK's incineration capacity may be the lowest in Europe in relation to waste structures, but if incineration or other forms of thermal treatment such as gasification are to be used, I agree that, wherever possible, they should be designed so as to recover heat and energy from waste, particularly in combined cycle processes. That option can certainly be considered. I accept that Essex has not ruled incineration in or out, but the priority is finding the most appropriate way of minimising the amount of waste going to landfill.

Common Agricultural Policy

3. **Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): How many representations she has received in the past month about the operation of the common agricultural policy. [126279]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): In the past month there have been 15 meetings and events that I, ministerial colleagues and officials from my Department have attended in which CAP reform has formed a major part of the discussions. Those meetings included individual farmers, farming unions, and environmental, consumer and landowner organisations, as well as Ministers from other countries. We have also received

around 30 letters and a number of telephone calls from hon. Members and members of the public about CAP reform.

Mr. Barnes: Following the CAP agreement in Luxemburg, what impact on third world agricultural imports and exports does my right hon. Friend seek from the World Trade Organisation negotiations in Mexico? Will the United States of America be influenced by the position adopted by the European Union and being pressed by the Government?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend will know that the European Union has already made an offer on the issues of market access and related matters, which lies on the table. The element of the negotiations on the world trade round that had not yet been dealt with was the issue of domestic subsidies, which was subject to the recent reform negotiations. I very much hope, and it will be the negotiating aim of the British Government, to improve the position and the access of developing countries, and to liberalise trade in general. With regard to the United States, I am strongly of the view that it will have been a surprise to all our negotiating partners that the EU has moved so far and made such major changes. We believe that that puts pressure now on others to take heed and similarly to consider what moves they should make to contribute to trade liberalisation, and there is some evidence that such rethinking is going on.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): With such advances in the reform of CAP, does the Secretary of State have a vision for the endgame on reform? Could we perhaps look forward to wholesale repatriation of the policy, and, if so, on what time scale?

Margaret Beckett: If by the wholesale repatriation of the policy the hon. Lady means that there should no longer be a common agricultural policy—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] It is no good Opposition Members saying hear, hear. It was not we who brought in the single European market, and it is not possible to have a single European market without having a common agricultural policy. What is important, though, is that the core of that common policy should be much more satisfactory than at present. That is what we have just secured.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): Has my right hon. Friend received any representations from upland farmers, such as those who live and work in my constituency in the North York Moors national park? The reforms could have a considerable impact on those farmers who are on marginal incomes, working on marginal land in remote marginal areas. If she has not received such representations, will she consider coming up to the North York moors and meeting some of my constituents to hear what they think about the proposals?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend makes a powerful case on behalf of his constituents, as ever. I am mindful of the concerns that he and others raise. It was very much part of our approach to the reform negotiations that we should have the capacity to deal with some of the problems and issues that reform will throw up, and we were mindful, as were many other member states, of the impact on those who farm marginal land. My hon. Friend and his constituents will like to know that we are about to launch a consultation exercise in England on the options available to us under the reform agreement, and we expect to follow that up with a more detailed consultation later in the year, when the legal texts are in place and there is more detail on the implications. One of the reasons for seeking, successfully, to negotiate a national envelope was to give us room for manoeuvre to deal with the kind of issue that my hon. Friend raised.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Does the right hon. Lady agree on the importance to farm businesses and others of making sure that there is a smooth transition from the current arrangements to the new system of payments? Given that her Department's figures, in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), show that the Rural Payments Agency is late this year in dealing with more than 230,000 claims worth more than £95 million, what action is she taking to guarantee that the RPA will be capable of introducing the new system efficiently and on time?

Margaret Beckett: I entirely recognise the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. Although we were a little disappointed in some ways that the initial proposal date for reform in 2004 was postponed until the beginning of 2005, that will help us in securing a greater possibility of smooth transition. We are very mindful of exactly the point that he makes. The RPA has been suffering after the installation of new IT, which was much needed, but has certainly caused difficulties. The staff are working extraordinarily hard to overcome those difficulties, with a certain measure of success. I assure him that it is no wish of mine to see valuable reforms discredited because we cannot introduce them as effectively as we would wish.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Despite comments from Opposition Members, does the Secretary of State recognise that the significance of the mid-term review is that it gives the UK Government and other partner states more flexibility to meet national need? Will she begin a series of meetings with farmers and landowners, so that they can understand the nature of the reforms and plan their businesses appropriately?

Margaret Beckett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is entirely right that we need to get out as much information as we can as speedily as we can through organisations such as the National Farmers Union and whatever other channels we can use. We shall certainly endeavour to do that. As I said, I have already identified a two-stage consultation process, but one of the potential advantages that we see in the reform proposals is that they will allow us to introduce greatly simplified schemes, so I hope that the issues will not be nearly so difficult to explain.

Common Agricultural Policy

4. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What representations she has received on the proposals for rural development policy under the mid-term review of common agricultural policy. [126280]

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): We received 117 responses to our consultation on the Commission's CAP reform proposals, most of which commented on the rural development aspects. Like ministerial colleagues and officials from the Department, I have had numerous meetings over the past six months with a wide range of stakeholders. CAP reform was a part of those discussions, which included the wider rural dimension.

Miss McIntosh: Does the Minister agree that the new system will be overly bureaucratic and extremely expensive to apply? As the current Administration cannot cope with the present rural payments scheme, how will they cope with the new one, which has to be paid into a central pot from which we will get back only a certain percentage to spend in this country?

Alun Michael: I should point out to the hon. Lady that, for rural development, the package will mean that more funds have been switched from pillar one to pillar two under EU compulsory modulation. The implementation date has been brought forward a year to 2005 and the UK will get a bigger share of those funds, at about 11 per cent. We are working very hard to try to reduce the amount of bureaucracy that is involved in the England rural development programme. One has to accept that it involves a lot of bureaucracy, but we are trying to do all we can to use the mid-term review as an opportunity to simplify systems.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Does my right hon. Friend agree that rural development policy should include support for the development of biofuels, not only to give us an environmentally friendly fuel, but to create much-needed new markets for farmers? Does he agree that the key to that support is a reduction in duty rates? Are there any environmental reasons why there is such a large differential in the duty rate reductions given for liquefied petroleum gas and biodiesel?

Alun Michael: The complexity of my hon. Friend's question illustrates the mixture of issues that this matter involves. I agree that we want to see the promotion of biofuels and ministerial colleagues and I are looking at that issue. Of course, the mixture of technicalities, the question of bringing products to market and tax regimes are all part of the bigger equation.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The Minister will appreciate that, under the mid-term review proposals, some farms will be eligible for all their land to receive payment under the new decoupled arrangements, while others such as those that have mixed arable and horticultural crops will still have to pay for all their environmental responsibilities, but not with money related to their whole cultivable land area. What will be done to respond to the environmental demands of those who produce horticultural crops either on 100 per cent. of their land or part of their land under the new arrangements?

Alun Michael: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's point. Of course, the choices that farmers made on previous occasions have implications. It is also worth pointing out that the Commission has committed itself to making transitional arrangements for member states that are operating voluntary modulation; that should enable the UK to roll out the entry level agri-environment scheme, which is important for the industry as a whole.

Darwin Mounds

5. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): If she will make a statement on her work with the European Commission to devise measures to protect the Darwin Mounds from damage caused by fishing trawl nets at deep water levels. [126281]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): We wrote to the European Commission on 23 June pressing the case for it to introduce emergency measures to close the Darwin Mounds to damaging fishing activities.

Mr. Dalyell: Is fishery protection going to be afforded this summer and autumn; otherwise, it will be goodbye to the Darwin Mounds?

Mr. Bradshaw: I share my hon. Friend's frustration with the length of time that it has taken for us to get movement on this. However, I remind him that this is the first time that any member state of the European Union has requested that the Commission use its new powers to protect the marine environment—powers, I might add, that we helped to negotiate in the course of the reform of the common fisheries policy. Following talks in Brussels yesterday involving the head of fisheries in our Department, we are confident that the Commission is taking our request seriously.

GM Public Debate

6. **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): How many individuals have participated in the GM public debate. [126282]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): More than 1,000 individuals participated in the six regional launch events. Many more people have taken part in local meetings or through the debate website. Although we do not have exact figures, more than 17,000 feedback forms have been received so far.

Mr. Thomas: I thank the Minister for that reply. As I understand that only 14,000 feedback forms were published, that is a pretty good result. At least someone is contributing to the debate. What was the tenor of those replies? Did they run in favour of the commercial planting of GM crops?

In the debate in Westminster Hall a couple of weeks ago, the Minister was good enough to say that although the GM public debate was coming to an end tomorrow, the public would have a chance to inform the ongoing debate when the results of the field trials and other studies were published in the autumn. Will he say a little more about that?

Will he explain how it will be possible for consumers to ensure that they do not have to eat GM foods, if that is their choice?

Mr. Morley: On the latter point, labelling and traceability has to be the key. We are strongly in favour of that, and we welcome the proposals that have been made by the European Union.

In relation to the ongoing debate, the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment has agreed to facilitate a public event to provide an opportunity to consider the results of the field-scale evaluations once the Royal Society has evaluated them in September.

Feedback from the public debate was organised by an independent steering board, and the Government have not had a chance to see the full details. The responses will be presented to the Government in due course; we will of course take very seriously the views that have been registered.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West and Royton): Given that the Prime Minister's strategy unit reported last week that there is currently no economic case for GM in the UK; given that there are clear health and allergy risks as there have been virtually no health tests on human beings in relation to eating GM food; given that the environmental farm-scale evaluation trials are extremely narrow and limited; given that the Canadian experience shows clearly that GM will wipe out the organic sector—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Supplementaries should be only one question.

Mr. Meacher *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Morley: I understand the views of my right hon. Friend; we have had the opportunity to discuss them on several occasions. The report that came out of the No. 10 strategy unit was fair, balanced, open and transparent. It made clear, with no illusions, the detailed situation in relation to the economic role of GM crops and public reaction to them.

In relation to the other issues that my right hon. Friend raised, I promised that I would write to him in some detail. That letter has now been completed, and he will receive it in the next day or two.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): My understanding of the situation is that the Government do not intend that the debate will be closed down on any particular day; that their purpose is to stimulate the widest possible public debate; and that the only people who are seeking to close down the debate are those whose minds are firmly made up and firmly closed. Can the Minister confirm that?

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is correct. As with all issues, some people take polarised positions and are not prepared to listen to the arguments. I do not believe that that applies to the majority of the public, who are interested in this issue and who want to see the arguments for and against. I can confirm that this is an ongoing debate. A whole range of issues must be decided, such as the evaluation of the field-scale trials and issues of co-existence and of environmental liability. There will be opportunities for public debate and discussion, and we will ensure that the public get those chances.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): But who will speak for those in the poorest and hungriest countries who feel that, at best, genetic modification is a technological fix that tackles the symptoms of hunger but does nothing to tackle the causes? Is it not the case that the problem—corporate control of the food chain through patents and seed ownership—remains unaddressed?

Mr. Morley: There are a range of issues relating to developing countries, including the claim that GM technology may offer advantages to them. Such claims should be examined on their merits, and examined critically. I also accept that GM is only one of a number of issues in terms of dealing with the problems of developing countries, and we should take all of those seriously.

Andrew George (St. Ives): But what is the hurry? The public are at best suspicious, the science is not ready, the supermarkets say that they will not stock the stuff, and it would be a public relations disaster for farmers. Does the Minister agree that these decisions should be based on sound science, not quick, make-do or hasty science? Therefore, what reassurances can he give today that he is prepared to face down the GM and biotech lobby and the United States to ensure that we do not take a decision in haste that we repent at our leisure?

Mr. Morley: I remind the hon. Gentleman that this discussion on GM has been going on for long time. I participated in the debate on introducing the moratorium in 1997–98, when I was a Minister in the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. That moratorium has been in place, the supply chain initiative on modified agricultural crops has been set up, and we have had the field-scale evaluations. A lot of hurdles remain to cross before we will be able to consider commercialisation in the UK, so I do not believe that there is a great dash towards GM.

What we cannot ignore, however, is that GM is a fact of life in large parts of the world. We are in a global market, and we cannot ignore the impact of that, which is why we must consider such matters as labelling, regulation, consumer choice and choice for farmers and processors. We are doing all those things in parallel.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): My hon. Friend will know that the science review is part of that public debate. Can he give a date for its publication? Does he agree that it must be seen to be objective and independent? Does he share my concern that the food safety section on GM is being written, so I am told, by a Monsanto employee, who clearly has a direct interest in the industry?

Mr. Morley: I can tell my hon. Friend that the projected date for publication is September—

Joan Ruddock: Of the science review?

Mr. Morley: Sorry, that review is expected to be published between the end of July and the beginning of August. It is true that the science panel has two members who are connected with biotech industries, but I should point out that it consists of 26 people, and that two other members are from non-governmental organisations. The idea is that the scientific panel should offer a balance of views, so that there is a proper, balanced, open and transparent submission that people can consider on its merits.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): It is difficult to have faith in the Government's policy on GM when the former Minister responsible—a man whom I admire, the whole House admires and the Chancellor, apparently, particularly admires—is so doubtful about it. That right hon. Gentleman has called for sound, independent and thorough research, which is surely a prerequisite of a valid debate and valid conclusions. Will the Minister therefore make all such research that the Government have received available to Members of the House, commission new research when it does not exist, and have a public debate based on that kind of research evidence? If the Government do not do so, people will ask, "What do they have to hide?".

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is getting prematurely paranoid on this issue. I can assure him that all scientific papers and reviews will be made available to the House and to the public at large. The whole idea of the scientific review is to pull together the research that is being done on GMs, and I have made it clear that there will be an ongoing public debate on this issue. People will be free to express their views, as will hon. Members on both sides of the House, according to the procedures of the House. We will take that seriously and, above all, we will make sure that everything that emerges from the research, from public concerns and concerns raised by hon. Members is taken into account in an open and transparent way.

UK Beef Industry

7. **Mr. Peter Duncan** (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): If she will make a statement on prospects for the UK beef industry. [126283]

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): The prospects for UK beef are excellent. The recent recommendation by the Food Standards Agency to phase out the over-30-month rule is a demonstration of high confidence in UK beef. Producer returns are at their highest level since 1995, and CAP reform will simplify support systems and encourage beef farmers to produce what the consumer wants.

Mr. Duncan: The Minister will be aware that the lifting of the over-30-month scheme will be welcomed by everyone in the UK beef industry, particularly in my constituency. However, the manner in which the scheme is to be removed poses a real threat to price stability in the industry, with the threat of a collapse in market price if change is effected too quickly. Some very fragile rural communities face uncertainty once more. Will the Minister commit his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to looking once again into phasing out the scheme over two, three or four years, to provide market stability while ensuring that consumer confidence is maintained?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman raises some important issues. It is clear that a large increase in supplies of beef could cause disruption to the market. We are discussing the implications of changes to the OTM rule with the European Commission, which has primary responsibility for managing the market in the EU. We have also set up a working group with the industry to explore the likely impact on the market of increased supplies of beef and how they can best be managed. So we are addressing the concerns expressed by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Does the Minister accept that to get rid of the over-30-month scheme would be an enormous prize for the whole agricultural industry? We had to introduce it because there was an emergency in people's confidence in food and in animal health. That had the consequence of closing our export markets. It would be absurd if we put the cart before the horse and failed to recognise that getting rid of the scheme would be the greatest vote of confidence that we could possibly give our industry. Will the Minister ensure that, even if there are risks of market disruption, they are balanced against the prize to be seized from the scheme's removal?

Alun Michael: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. The confidence that has been placed in the British beef industry is well merited. When one meets beef producers around the countryside, it is interesting to see that many are now taking the initiative to connect well with their market, not only by producing what consumers want but by getting across to them the quality of the product that they are offering. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman: we should have confidence in the industry.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): May I reinforce what my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) has said? It would also be reassuring to know that the Minister was keeping under review the need to continue testing over-30-month beef. In particular, will he also keep under review the costs of those tests?

Alun Michael: Yes, the right hon. and learned Gentleman is right; we are absolutely committed to that course.

Genetically Modified Organisms

8. **Gregory Barker** (Bexhill and Battle): If she will extend the period of the Government-sponsored public debate on genetically modified organisms. [126284]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): The public debate was announced last July, and we have already extended the timetable by three months at the

request of the steering board. The public can, of course, continue to debate the issues surrounding GM after GM Nation has formally concluded.

Gregory Barker: We have heard in the House this morning that there is still a great deal of interest in this debate, as well as a great many unanswered questions. I simply do not understand why the Minister cannot extend into the autumn this clear channel for the public to focus their remarks, given that so much more research is being produced. The university of Manitoba has undertaken an evaluation for the Canadian wheat board of Monsanto's GM Roundup Ready wheat, which concluded:

"Under current conditions the release of Roundup Ready wheat in western Canada would be environmentally unsafe."

When this quality of research is coming through, why close down this very useful channel of public feedback?

Mr. Morley: It is because this is a formal process. The independent GM public debate steering board under Professor Grant has done a good job in encouraging public participation. That is why so much has been written about the subject recently and there is much debate in Parliament. That has been the spin off from that debate. However, we cannot keep a formal structure going indefinitely. That does not mean that the opportunity will be closed off for people to comment and to raise issues, for those issues to be examined, and for answers to be given by our independent specialist bodies, but we do not need a rolling, formal public debate with no end.

Norman Baker (Lewes): The public want more time to make their views known. The Food Standards Agency's report yesterday stated:

"The potential impact of GM crops on the environment was the issue that gave rise to most concern"

among consumers. In answer to the previous question, the Minister talked about the many hurdles to cross. Does he accept that the most important hurdle to overcome is the complete absence of an environmental liability regime? It would be quite improper to allow any commercial planting until such a regime was in place. Will he guarantee that a regime will be put in place before any commercial planting is allowed?

Mr. Morley: There are EU agreements on environmental liability. We have also asked for advice from the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission on how we should structure a particular liability regime in this country. I suspect that existing law provides recourse in relation to liability, but that is a matter for legal opinion. Liability is but one issue that is not yet resolved. We cannot have commercialisation until we have examined a range of issues and established a proper framework to ensure that, as the bottom line, if people do not want to buy and eat GM produce, they do not have to. That consumer choice should be protected, which is our intention.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): Has the Minister noted that it is possible to produce valuable new species without resorting to genetic modification? Is he aware that F.B. Parrish Farms in Chicksands in Bedfordshire has produced a new species of onion called the "supasweet", which is tear free and a valuable addition to the healthy-eating salad market? Will his Department do all it can to promote that product?

Mr. Morley: I have heard about this new onion development, and I am very impressed. I do not know whether it also helps with breath odour after eating onions, which would be a particularly impressive breakthrough. There have been an awful lot of advances in conventional agriculture. Although, understandably, people focus on GM, the report from the strategy unit stressed that GM is but one approach, and that there are conventional ways of achieving advances in agricultural technology. The hon. Gentleman has given us a good example of that.

Aviation (Environmental Impacts)

9. **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): What recent discussions she has had with the Department for Transport on the environmental impacts of aviation. [126285]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): My ministerial colleagues and I have regular discussions with the ministerial team in the Department for Transport on many issues, including the environmental impacts of aviation. DEFRA Ministers and officials are closely engaged with the Department for Transport in taking forward the aviation White Paper and seeking to ensure that environmental concerns are addressed.

Tom Brake: I thank the Secretary of State for that response. She will be aware that the royal commission estimates that by 2020 aviation's contribution to greenhouse emissions will have risen sharply to 22 per cent. of the UK's total. What assessment has she made of that, and of the impact it will have on the Government's aspirational targets for reducing CO_2? Will she work with the Secretary of State for Transport and the Department of Trade and Industry, supporters of an international aviation fuel tax, to raise the issue of such a tax in the international forums that she attends?

Margaret Beckett: Yes, I am conscious of the royal commission's assessment. I have not made a separate assessment or calculation, although people keep this matter under continual review. Irrespective of whether the precise figures are correct—no doubt different scientists will have different views, because that always happens—emissions from aviation make a substantial contribution, and we are mindful of that. As for a fuel tax, I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government have always pressed the International Civil Aviation Organisation to examine these issues, because they are subject to international, not just domestic, agreement, as he rightly identified.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): During the period preceding the finalisation of moves towards an international fuel tax, has my right hon. Friend considered proposals from the Carbon Trust and other

organisations for voluntary "green" carbon restitution levies on air tickets, related to the amount of carbon that could be restituted from the flights involved?

Margaret Beckett: I know of a number of initiatives from various organisations, of which that is one. I thank my hon. Friend for drawing attention to suggestions that, where emissions continue, we should consider creative methods of restitution. I think that that is a valuable and worthwhile initiative, particularly because it publicises the issue; but, as I am sure my hon. Friend will be the first to agree, it is not as important as mitigating the environmental impacts in the first place.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): As the right hon. Lady will know, the Sustainable Development Commission believes that, given current trends, carbon emissions from aviation will negate all the savings made under the Government's climate change programme. Does she agree with that assessment? If so, are the Government now seriously considering bringing aviation within the ambit of the European Union emissions trading system?

Margaret Beckett: What comes within the ambit of that system is a matter for mutual negotiation, and these issues will obviously be raised during such negotiation.

As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), there will always be different calculations and different figures. I know the Sustainable Development Commission believes that the emissions will negate all the savings, and I have noted other suggestions that do not go quite as far. I do not think anyone disputes the fact that unchecked emissions and unchecked traffic could make a substantial dent in the savings that we are committed to making. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are keeping all these issues under constant review.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Has the Department considered, specifically and in detail, the environmental impact of airport expansion in the south-east, and have comparisons been made? If so, and if it is decided that expanding Luton would cause the least environmental damage, will my right hon. Friend make that point to her colleagues?

Margaret Beckett: That is very much part of the evaluation that my colleagues in the Department for Transport are undertaking. I am aware of Luton's inventive efforts to press its case, and interested to note that my hon. Friend supports them.

Convention on the Future of Europe

10. **Mr. Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh, North and Leith): What assessment she has made of the implications of the proposals from the Convention on the Future of Europe on processes for reaching decisions in the EU on environmental policy. [126286]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): The Convention's proposals would leave the main elements of that process largely unchanged. However, we do not support the proposal to create a single Legislative Council.

Mr. Lazarowicz: I am pleased that, in its final proposals, the Convention restored environmental protection as one of the EU's core objectives after its removal from the original draft. Will my hon. Friend assure us, however, that the Government will ensure, in the negotiations to follow, that it remains one of the core objectives? Given the exchange that has just taken place on air fuel, does he agree that there is a strong case for the EU to have a greater role in co-ordinating environmental protection on a Europe-wide basis?

Mr. Morley: We think that issues such as air travel and pollution should be dealt with in the Environment Council, but I assure my hon. Friend that the statement about environmental protection in the constitution is considered important and is fully supported by the UK. We shall want to ensure that it remains.

Angus Robertson (Moray): During its analysis of implications of the draft EU constitution, what conclusions has the Department reached on why the concentration of marine biological resources is to be an exclusive competence, while the common agricultural policy is not? The Leader of the House was unable to explain that to the European Scrutiny Committee yesterday; can the Minister explain it to the House today?

Mr. Morley: I can certainly give an explanation relating to the common fisheries policy, which has always been an exclusive competence of the Commission. The constitution states the position exactly.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Does my hon. Friend agree that the proposals in the draft constitution for the European Union, which include greater powers for the European Parliament, will make further reform of the common agricultural policy more likely?

Mr. Morley: I think that there is an argument to be had on that point on both sides. We want to ensure that we do not have a hugely bureaucratic, cumbersome and slow decision-making process in the European Union. We recognise that it is important to involve the European Parliament, and there is a very strong role for co-decision, but it has to be balanced against the need to take quick and efficient decisions without excessive bureaucracy.

Fallen Stock Directive

11. **Sir Archy Kirkwood** (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): What representations she has received from representatives of the meat trade about the costs involved in the implementation of the fallen stock directive. [126287]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): There is no such thing as the fallen stock directive, but I have received a number of representations about the costs of implementing the ban on the burial of fallen stock under the EU animal by-products regulation.

Sir Archy Kirkwood: I recognise that the policy thrust is right and I acknowledge that the Government have done a lot in this area to date, but will the Minister assure the House that he will talk urgently to his counterparts in the devolved legislatures in Scotland and Wales to try to establish a common, UK-wide disposal scheme? But in doing so, will he pay particular attention to the very large oncosts that some small butchers are having to deal with in terms of meat and bone refuse and off-cuts? In the course of their work, they are having to pay far bigger charges than certainly I expected. Does he understand that this is becoming an awful problem for Britain's butchers?

Mr. Bradshaw: Yes, we do recognise that this is a serious problem. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we cannot provide subsidised collection for retailers because it is against EU state aid rules; we can subsidise national collection only from primary production. I shall take on board his request that I speak to my colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—indeed, I have done so already. We are continuing to work hard towards a successful national scheme.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Is the Minister aware that hunts provide a very considerable service in dealing with fallen stock, and that if the Government are determined to go ahead with banning hunting, a real animal welfare issue will arise? For example, it is very difficult to get animals with broken legs to a slaughterhouse; often, they have to be transported great distances and endure considerable suffering. Will the Minister consider that issue and see what can be done to ease the problem?

Mr. Bradshaw: I am aware of the role that hunts play in the removal of fallen stock, but I do not think that it is quite as significant as the hon. Gentleman suggests. A small minority of livestock farmers are involved, and they, of course, are also free to join the national scheme.

Rural Community Transport

13. **Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk): If she will make a statement on funding of rural community transport. [126289]

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): Funding for rural community transport schemes is available from a wide range of sources. They include the Department for Transport's rural bus challenge, which provides start-up funding, and the Countryside Agency's rural transport partnership and parish transport fund programmes. Long-term funding is available through the bus service operators' grant, and local authorities can also use their revenue support grant, and capital resources provided through the local transport plan system, to support community transport schemes.

Norman Lamb: I thank the Minister for that response. I agree that the Countryside Agency has done a great deal to encourage and facilitate the development of community transport throughout the country, but is he aware of the very real concern that exists that, as the pump-priming money comes to an end, there is no sustainable funding to take its place? What is he doing to deal with this issue, and is he prepared to meet representatives of the Community Transport Association and other interested parties to discuss their concerns further?

Alun Michael: I am happy to confirm the importance of community transport, and I have met several people involved in a number of schemes in the past year. It is also worth noting that community transport plays an increasingly important role in rural areas generally. In recognition of that and as part of the Government's public service agreement target for improving rural services, we aim to increase the percentage of settlements in England benefiting from community transport to more than 50 per cent. by 2006. Pump priming through the Countryside Agency is meant to be just that: pump priming to help kick-start the availability of those activities. I listed in my original answer the various places from which support for community transport schemes is available.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Does the Minister understand the difficulties that local authorities and council tax payers face when rural bus services are funded for three years only? In the fourth year, there is a big hit on the local authority, causing council tax bills to rise even higher. If the services are worth funding, surely they are worth funding indefinitely.

Alun Michael: It is a little odd to suggest, on the one hand, that we should be helping to pump prime while, on the other, complaining when funds are taken away. Local authorities have a role in developing rural transport for their local communities. Through the local transport plans, they are required to produce bus strategies and to consider how to integrate conventional bus services with health and community transport as part of an integrated public transport network. We have tried to provide funding to enable people to realise that innovative schemes based in local communities are an important part of the solution to the problems in rural areas, in which the Government have made a large investment over recent years.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): As the Minister says, that there are 5,000 community transport schemes, running about 60,000 buses across rural areas. People throughout the countryside are extremely concerned that an overspend in the countryside and rights of way right-to-roam mapping exercise has resulted in a drying-up of the pump-primed funding through the Countryside Agency. Bizarrely, visitors to the countryside—walkers—have been given priority for Government funding over those who live in the

countryside. Will the Minister reconfirm the central importance of community transport, particularly to the 25 per cent. of rural people who do not own a car, many of whom live in remote areas and are socially excluded? Does he accept that we need not only pump-primed funding, but long-term sustainable revenue funding for those vital services?

Alun Michael: That was a bizarre, ill-informed and muddled question. I should point out to the hon. Gentleman that no cuts of the sort about which he talked have been made. The budget for the rural transport partnership has increased since last year by £2 million to meet demand. A hold was put on the "vital villages" expenditure by the Countryside Agency, which was grappling with the problems of success. It had so many applications that it decided, rightly, to prioritise to make sure that money went to the places where it was needed most. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is embarrassed when he looks back at the 18 years of Conservative government, during which his Government did nothing to help rural communities in the way that this Government have done.

Common Land

15. **Mr. Roger Williams** (Brecon and Radnorshire): What plans she has to bring forward legislative proposals relating to common land; and if she will make a statement. [126291]

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): We will legislate as soon as parliamentary time allows. In July 2002, we published the common land policy statement, which set out a comprehensive package of proposals relating to the registration and protection of common land and village greens. A working group has developed proposals for agricultural management of common land, and we will consult on those before the end of September.

Mr. Williams: Common land is not only an important agricultural resource, but provides opportunities for wildlife conservation and recreation. Given that a report produced by stakeholders in the spring of this year was unanimous in its support for further legislation, and given that the mid-term review will give more opportunities for common land to be used in innovative ways, is it not time for the Government to bring this forward as a matter of priority?

Alun Michael: I have just indicated the way in which we will bring it forward. We recently had the report of the working group that we established, and we intend to consult on that by the end of September. I have not read the detail of the report yet because we have only just received it. The hon. Gentleman, with his constituency interest, will know that although the problems of common land and the biodiversity reasons for treating it with great care are understood, it is an enormously complex area of the law. I should be happy to discuss the issues with him once we have published the document, as I know of his constituency interest and the complexities in his part of the world.

BSE

17. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): What assessment she has made of the threat of BSE infection in the national herd; and if she will make a statement. [126293]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): The domestic BSE epidemic has fallen from a peak of over 37,000 cases in 1992 to around 1,000 cases last year. We must not be complacent, but that is significant progress towards eliminating the disease. Equally encouraging, red meat consumption is at its highest since 1985.

Michael Fabricant: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer and it is good to know that the incidence of BSE has fallen. However, the Minister says that he wishes to be complacent, so does he accept that one of the real risks of re-infection is the importation of illegal meat into the United Kingdom? When I asked his colleague a similar question some months ago, it was revealed that only two sniffer dogs serve all the sea ports and airports in the whole of the United Kingdom. It was promised that something would be done about it, so how many dogs do we have now?

Mr. Bradshaw: We do not get BSE by importing meat, but the hon. Gentleman is also absolutely wrong about the number of sniffer dogs. Since the responsibility for policing illegal food imports has been given to Customs and Excise, the number of seizures has more than trebled.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Act:

Communications Act 2003.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the part-time and redistributing Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Peter Hain): The business for the first week of the September sitting will be as follows:

MONDAY 8 SEPTEMBER—Second Reading of the Water Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER—Opposition Day [15th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 10 SEPTEMBER—Opposition Day [16th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the Liberal Democrats. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 11 SEPTEMBER—Motion to approve the Fifth Report on the Committee on Standards and Privileges, followed by a debate on defence in the United Kingdom on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 12 SEPTEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week after will include:

MONDAY 15 SEPTEMBER—Commons consideration of Lords amendments to the Local Government Bill.

I hope that the whole House will join me in extending birthday wishes to the right hon. Michael Foot, who will be 90 next Wednesday. Michael remains one of our greatest parliamentarians, who served the House and his constituents with great distinction for 42 years. We salute him and his passion for humanity, and we wish him well. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I would also like to wish all Members—and, more importantly, all the staff of the House—a very happy and relaxing recess.

Mr. Forth: I am more than happy to echo the good wishes of the House to Michael Foot, and also to all colleagues and staff for the recess.

Will the part-time Leader of the House confirm that the Northern Ireland suspension order will be reconfirmed by a statutory instrument, effectively hidden away in a Committee Upstairs? Does he not believe that that is a matter of major constitutional importance—not just for Northern Ireland, but for the United Kingdom—so it should and must be dealt with on the Floor of the House by the whole House? I hope that he will reflect on that matter, and if it is true, as I am informed, that the Government intend to hide the matter Upstairs, I hope that he will rethink and bring it to the Floor of the House—not least in view of the light business that he has announced for the first week back in September.

On the proposals to abolish jury service, we know that the Government have decided to reverse, here in the House of Commons, their lordships' excellent stand on that matter. Does the Leader of the House intend to deploy Scottish Members yet again to deprive us in England of centuries of judicial history, or will he give an undertaking that, now and in future, Scottish Members will be asked for a self-denying ordinance not to interfere in English judicial matters, as we do not interfere in theirs? I hope that he can give us that undertaking.

Yesterday in PMOs—

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): PMOs? What is that?

Mr. Forth: Prime Minister's obfuscations. Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) asked the Prime Minister whether he would confirm his commitment to reduce the number of Scottish MPs at Westminster—a simple enough question, one would have thought. The Prime Minister said:

"No, we made that commitment clear and we will of course carry it through."—[*Official Report*, 16 July 2003; Vol. 409, c. 278.]

Typically for the Prime Minister, he did not tell us when. Can the part-time Leader of the House tell us when the commitment given by the Government to reduce the number of Scottish Members of Parliament at Westminster will be carried through? Will it be during this Parliament, and before the next general election? That is a straightforward question and I hope that he can give us the answer to it.

You will be aware, Mr. Speaker, that notices of no fewer than 46 written ministerial statements have appeared on the Order Paper today. One of them is on the important and controversial issue of community pharmacies. We should be modestly grateful that the Government have responded to concern on that important issue in the form of a statement—but because it is a written statement, we cannot ask any questions on it. That statement contains some of the most obscure language that I have seen for a long time, even from this Government.

I shall give the House a small example:

"we will also make it easier for pharmacies to locate in areas where consumers already go, namely large shopping developments. But in doing so we must not undermine the market available to smaller community pharmacies. So only pharmacies wishing to locate in shopping developments over 15,000 square metres in size will be exempt from the control of entry requirement."

I do not understand what that means, and as things stand we will not have the opportunity to ask what it means, because it is a written ministerial statement. It continues:

"We will consult"—

that is good, I suppose—

"at the end of August, giving a full 12-week consultation period for comment."

Will the part-time Leader of the House confirm whether the House will have an opportunity to question Ministers on the issue when we come back in September, so that we can clear up what that language means about an issue of such importance to all of our constituents?

I have been approached this morning by a representative of some of our own staff in the House about a letter that has gone out this morning—in your name, Mr. Speaker—about the Portcullis pension plan. I would like the Leader of the House to give the matter some thought and work out how we may address the issue in the House. It is of the greatest importance to our own staff, because the letter contains a compulsion date

[Mr. Forth]

of 1 November, by which time they will be compelled to switch to new pension arrangements. I am told that there has not been adequate consultation on the matter and that staff representatives—including unions—have not been given proper access to the decision makers on the matter. I hope, therefore, that it can be revisited before the compulsion becomes effective on 1 November, to give a proper opportunity for consultation, or an element of choice, to be introduced. That is the least that can be done for our staff and their representatives. I hope that in the spirit of good will that the part-time Leader of the House offered us on the occasion of our rising for the recess, he will be able to consider the matter urgently and give some reassurance to our staff, who will be directly affected.

Other than that, I wish the part-time Leader of the House a very pleasant recess.

Mr. Hain: It is good to see the shadow Leader of the House back at his job full-time, having taken time out to be wined and dined by members of the press upstairs last week. He missed an entertaining debut by his deputy, who was described by the *Daily Mail*'s sketch writer as

"Handsome boy. Charming. Moderate. Witty without overdoing it."

The deputy shadow Leader of the House described his own performance in a notable column, in which he said:

"Explaining what I actually do is much more complicated. In fact, I'm still working on it."

The shadow Leader of the House asked several important questions, and I am happy to answer them. First, there is no intention to hide away anything on Northern Ireland. Such matters are debated on the Floor of the House, in the proper way, or Upstairs, in the proper way.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): The improper way.

Mr. Hain: That is a ridiculous comment. When the Conservatives were in government they had statutory instruments and other matters discussed Upstairs in the proper way.

The shadow Leader of the House says that the first week when we return is very light on business. There are Opposition debates on two of those four days—and if that means light business, the Opposition should consider more serious business and heavyweight agenda items for those days.

The right hon. Gentleman said that the question of the number of Scottish Members of Parliament had not been properly addressed. That is not the case. There has been much press speculation that the Government intend to delay the reduction in Scottish representation at Westminster, but it was just that—press speculation. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] I will come to that. There is no need for the Secretary of State for Scotland to make a statement to the House at this stage. The boundary commission is required to submit its report between December 2002 and December 2006, and it is a matter for the commission when, within that time scale, it does that. As soon as may be after the commission has submitted its report, the Secretary of State for Scotland is required to lay the requisite order implementing those matters. We await the boundary commission's report. It is conducting important work, as no doubt you will know, Mr. Speaker. We shall see where we are after that.

On the question about jury service, there is no proposition by the Government to abolish the right to jury trial, or jury service, as the right hon. Gentleman alleged. Some reforms have been proposed that the House of Lords has voted to block. In the process, it also blocked very important measures in the very important Criminal Justice Bill. *[Interruption.]* Oh yes it did. Those measures deal with violent sex offenders and gun crime, and I would be very interested to see whether the Conservatives follow the leadership of their comrades in the House of Lords and seek to block those vital anti-crime measures that our constituents want implemented.

May I take the right hon. Gentleman up on the important point about the equality of Members of the House? We are all elected as Members of this sovereign House of Commons, whether we come from Scotland, Wales, England or Northern Ireland, and I will assert to the end the equality of all Members of the House, who come from a United Kingdom. The right hon. Gentleman is effectively talking about dismembering the United Kingdom.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): What about Scottish Members?

Mr. Hain: What about Northern Ireland Members? Such remarks are coming from a party that until recently called itself the Conservative and Unionist party—perhaps it still does. Is it a United Kingdom party or is it not? The right hon. Gentleman should come clean. Is he saying that Scottish Members should be debarred from equal consideration?

Mr. Forth *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hain: In that case, is the right hon. Gentleman arguing—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Do not shout at the Leader of the House.

Mr. Hain: What about the English Tory Members who imposed the poll tax on Scotland? We know all about such behaviour.

The right hon. Gentleman also raised the question of the 46 written ministerial statements. I think that it is important that Ministers have come to the House before the recess to bring the House up to date—*[Interruption.]* We have had a very busy time recently—*[Interruption.]* Indeed we have. That is why we have had to sit past the normal moment of interruption on a number of occasions this week. It is important that we have made written ministerial statements, and that there is to be a statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, which will follow immediately after business questions.

The Government have laid out a clear position that will protect local pharmacies. However, the right hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to question the

Secretary of State on that matter after the recess, or even to hold an Opposition day debate on it should he want to.

The Portcullis pension plan is, of course, not a matter for me. However, I want to stress that it was very misleading—inadvertently, no doubt—of the shadow Leader of the House to say that compulsion was involved. There is no compulsion involved in this process, and we would respect staff rights in this matter, along with those of everybody else.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am delighted to associate my colleagues and myself with the comments made about Michael Foot. His strong Cornish connections mean that he is especially revered in the south-west. I also endorse the comments of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) on the Portcullis pension scheme. There is real concern among staff in the House about the lack of consultation.

Will the Leader of the House examine carefully the way in which the Government's overnight statement in response to the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform was brought before us? I hope that I can say that he had no part in its handling, because I hope that if I absolve him from responsibility he will take what I have to say in the spirit in which it is intended.

Clearly, after the recess we shall require an early debate on the document, which is a miserable little response to an extremely important issue. It is late—it should have been produced last week—and it is suspicious that it was released at midnight, so that no one could have the chance to consider it carefully. However, worst of all is the fact that the way in which the document has been produced seems completely to deny what happened in this House, because it is deliberately misleading in several respects.

For example, the Lord Chancellor's statement says:

"Those votes resulted in a clear decision in the House of Lords in favour of a wholly appointed House. There was, however, no such clear decision from the House of Commons, which voted against every one of the Joint Committee's proposed configurations."

The Leader of the House knows, because he too voted, that this House voted against a fully appointed House of Lords by a large majority, despite the fact that the then Lord Chancellor and the Prime Minister supported that outcome. There is the first bit of misleading information, because this House voted down that option by a majority of 78.

The Government's response continues:

"The Government agrees with the Joint Committee's view that the Parliamentary votes have shown that there is no consensus about introducing any elected element in the House of Lords."

That is patently untrue. You will know, Mr. Speaker, as will the Leader of the House, that a total of 332 Members voted in favour of a substantial elected element in the House of Lords—more than half the Members of the House. The problem was that they did not all vote in the same Lobby at the same time—some voted for an elected element of 100 per cent., some voted for 80 per cent. and some voted for 60 per cent. It is patent nonsense to say that we did not indicate that we wanted an elected element in the House of Lords.

The Leader of the House knows that the following statement is misleading:

"The Joint Committee highlights the position of the remaining hereditary peers. It remains the Government's policy, as set out in its White Paper in November 2001, that the remaining hereditary peers should be removed from the House."

However, that is conditional on the existence of a package of reforms for the House of Lords; it cannot be done as a simple tinkering exercise on its own. The Leader of the House spoke about the sovereignty of the House, and this miserable little document ignores the votes of the House, so we expect him to stand up for us.

Mr. Hain: Of course I will stand up for the House's rights in every respect, because that is my job. I look forward to working with the hon. Gentleman on that, which we have already started to do. May I also express my gratitude for his remarks, and those of the shadow Leader of the House, about Michael Foot? As the hon. Gentleman will understand, the arrangements for the publication of the document are a matter not for me but for the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs. Copies of the document have been made available in the Vote Office in the proper way.

I shall now deal with the substance of the issue. Earlier this year, no option was supported by the House, which I regret. I voted for a fully elected second Chamber; that was my preference, and I had a free vote. However, there is no consensus in the House, and until that is achieved a sustainable long-lasting solution to the problem is not readily available.

Nevertheless, there are important issues to deal with in the short term. The Government have a manifesto commitment to abolish the hereditary peers and to deal with the question of a proper independent statutory appointments procedure.

Mr. Tyler: And?

Mr. Hain: Indeed, we also have a commitment to make the House of Lords more democratic and representative, which is clear. We might be able to deal with those matters in the short time and provide a solution to take us a little way forward, but a long-term sustainable solution requires consensus in the House—indeed, in both Houses, I hope—on how to move forward. I look forward to hearing views from the hon. Gentleman, and from hon. Members of all parties, on how we may proceed so that we get a democratic second Chamber.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I am happy—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Thank you. Perhaps I may be allowed to develop my point in my own way.

I am happy to associate myself with the observation of my right hon. Friend in wishing a happy birthday to Michael Foot, one of our most distinguished leaders. Perhaps my right hon. Friend may wish to associate himself with me when I recall that one of Michael Foot's most celebrated passages of arms was when he stopped the creation of an all-appointed second Chamber in place of the House of Lords.

My right hon. Friend cannot have forgotten that when we voted on the options, the largest single majority was against an all-appointed Chamber. He cannot have

[Mr. Robin Cook]

forgotten it because he was part of that majority. In the light of that outcome, will he explain why the Government will propose to the House of Commons that we have an all-appointed second Chamber

"in a stable state for the medium term"?

I am sure that my right hon. Friend has not forgotten—but perhaps others in the Government have—that in our manifesto we promised a democratic second Chamber. As for putting the Appointments Commission on a statutory basis, I remind him that two years ago the first batch picked by the Appointments Commission was such a public relations disaster that since then we have begged it not to propose any more appointments.

My right hon. Friend knows this place. He will understand that unless the Government have a perspective for democratic reform in the longer term, he will have difficulty—and will deserve to have difficulty—in getting this pusillanimous, pathetic, mean measure through Parliament.

Mr. Hain: I understand and respect my right hon. Friend's views. How we voted is on the record. Unfortunately, all the positions were defeated, although as he fairly points out, some more narrowly than others. We know what the House is against; the problem is that we do not know what it is for. In the meantime, we have to deal with the anomaly of hereditary peers, which no one can defend. It is a commitment in the Labour party manifesto, on which we were elected with a landslide victory, to resolve that anomaly. Making the appointments procedure more independent is part of that. We are consulting on that and will come back to the House after the recess to take that forward.

I agree, however, that a fully appointed Chamber in the long term—[HON. MEMBERS: "How long?"] I am not talking about the short-term issues that we need to confront. In the long term, a fully appointed Chamber is not, in my view, a sustainable solution to the problem.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The United Kingdom opt-out from the euro has been deliberately excluded from the draft constitutional treaty that emerged from the Convention. The Leader of the House was, of course, the Government's representative in those negotiations. I tabled a question to the Prime Minister for that to be explained, which was due to be answered on 15 July. It was put to the Prime Minister, and he passed it to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who in turn passed it to the Chief Secretary. I still have not had a reply, but as the Leader of the House was responsible for negotiations, will he be good enough to explain why the arrangements for entry to the euro have been geared significantly against the UK's national interest? Why was the opt-out deliberately excluded? What are the Government going to do about it?

Mr. Hain: On the precise point about the EMU opt-out, a number of protocols in existing treaties have not been brought into the existing constitutional treaty because there was not time for the Convention to address them. The Convention carried out serious and effective work in the intergovernmental conference, as the hon. Gentleman knows—

Mr. Cash: It was deliberate.

Mr. Hain: It was not deliberate. That is another fantasy. It is, frankly, one of those Tory porkies that are spread about Europe—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Yes, they are. A whole lot of porkies have been spread about Europe by Tories and their friends in the media, as though we were involved in a deliberate exercise. A number of protocols, including the opt-out, will have to be introduced through the IGC. They exist and are live. There is no mystery about that.

We know what the real agenda is. The hon. Gentleman, along with his leader, is a supporter of the Bruges group, which on 24 February issued a press release that said of the European Union:

"It would have been better if we'd never joined."

That is their agenda: withdrawal from the EU.

Mr. Cash: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Points of order come later.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Harking back to the argument about the Lords started by the Liberal spokesman—the argument about what happens to the House of Lords in future—is my right hon. Friend aware that the only way in which he could have got what he wanted—a truly 100 per cent. elected House of Lords—was by having a whipped vote on the Labour Benches? I take umbrage when I hear people, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), give the impression that they want their say, but only their say. Some of us—well over 100 Labour Members—want to abolish the undemocratic House of Lords. The same thing will happen whenever there is a free vote, but even if the Government want to whip me on the proposal supported by my right hon. Friends, I will still vote to abolish the lousy place. They should come clean. Those people who want their say on the matter should admit that they want a whipped vote, because it is the only way to get it through.

Mr. Hain: It is great having my hon. Friend back in his inimitable fiery form. It is really good to have him putting such questions to me.

Abolition of the House of Lords was another option—for which he and a number of colleagues voted—that was defeated. That underlines my point. All the propositions were defeated. So the House knows what it is against, but it does not know what it is for. I look to a time when there is a consensus in the House for a substantial, long-term and sustainable reform. If a Government Bill is introduced in future, there will, of course, be a whip, because this is a vital matter of constitutional reform.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Leader of the House asserted his strong, principled belief in the equality of all hon. Members. Will he confirm that after business questions it will be in order for me to go to the Table Office and table questions

about schools in Scotland in the same way as Scottish Members can table questions about schools in my constituency?

Mr. Hain: This is mischief making again. *[Interruption.]* Of course it is. It is anti-Scottish. When the Opposition get round to it, it will be anti-Welsh as well. We stand—*[Interruption.]* English Members on the Conservative Benches, and some on the Labour Benches, quite properly ask me questions as Secretary of State for Wales. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that they should be debarred from doing so? Of course not.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): What will my right hon. Friend do about early-day motion 1579, which calls for brief questions and brief answers on the Floor of the House?

[That this House appreciates the regular interventions of Mr Speaker to encourage honourable Members to ask succinct questions and for Ministers to respond in similar ways, thus enabling more honourable Members to be called during question times and in response to Ministerial statements; accepts the wise words of Plato (Protagoras 3429–3436) 'that the art of framing brief, taut and telling phrases is a mark of the highest culture'; and affirms its intention to now pursue the recept of Plato for 'laconic brevity'.]

Mr. Hain: Yes.

David Burnside (South Antrim): I rise as a Member of Parliament for Northern Ireland who hopes, for as long as I am in the House, to speak and vote on all issues affecting all parts of the United Kingdom, in the same way as English, Welsh and Scottish Members will speak and vote on issues affecting my part of the UK, Northern Ireland.

Will the Leader of the House join me in praising the peaceful weekend of the 12 July celebrations? Will he praise not only my fellow countrymen who are Orangemen like myself, but our Roman Catholic neighbours, who contributed to the most peaceful 12 July celebrations that I can remember for more than 30 years? The Leader of the House knows that we have not had devolution in an executive form since autumn last year. When we come back for the two weeks in September, will it be possible for the House to debate whether we can get a form of Government up and running at Stormont again that has both Irish nationalist and Ulster Unionist consent?

Mr. Hain: We are anxious to achieve that, as the hon. Gentleman knows. We wish to work together with him, other Northern Irish Members and the parties represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly to achieve that result. It is a priority objective for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and we share that.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's earlier statement about the equality of Members in this place. The Conservative party has become an isolated party in the United Kingdom, with no representatives in Wales, for example, and a minority representation in England. Those Conservative Members who are seeking to balkanise the House are in a minority position in England, and they will continue to be so long as they advocate such ridiculous policies.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): My right hon. Friend will know that as a result of my position in the Treasury Select Committee I have received representations from credit unions over the past few years. They have expressed gratitude to both the Government and the Financial Services Authority for the progress that has been made in respect of their organisations. On a recent visit to Washington, I was informed that both the White House and Congress have credit unions, but the parliamentary estate does not. Within that estate there are thousands of workers, a number of whom are on comparatively low pay and would benefit from such an organisation. Will my right hon. Friend agree to discuss the issue with me to see whether he can take the matter forward?

Mr. Hain: I will be happy to do that. My hon. Friend has raised an important point. Credit unions are very strong in Wales, for example, and I am a great supporter of them.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): Thousands of criminal cases that involve mandatory life sentences are awaiting the awarding of tariffs. That is causing a great deal of distress to many of the families of victims. Given the huge backlog that has emerged and is developing, will the Leader of the House encourage the Home Secretary to outline to the House a timetable for the setting of tariffs?

Mr. Hain: I will certainly discuss that matter with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary when I get a chance to do so.

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): At this time of year, many hon. Members will, I hope, be considering taking British holidays at our seaside resorts, such as Morecambe, where they will see the splendour of the British coast. What they may not see is the squalor that often lies behind the promenades and façade. Will my right hon. Friend consider after the recess a debate on seaside deprivation? I can assure him that the pockets of deprivation that exist in some of our seaside resorts match anything in the inner cities.

Mr. Hain: I am glad that my hon. Friend has raised that matter. I have visited her lovely constituency town of Morecambe, which is indeed an extremely good holiday destination. She makes the important point that behind the promenade lurks a great deal of deprivation. That is why the Government have a clear strategy for seaside resorts, and we look forward to working with her—

Mr. Forth: It is not working.

Mr. Hain: The right hon. Gentleman mutters that it is not working. Nothing worked under the Conservatives. We are introducing huge programmes of urban and seaside regeneration. Huge extra investment is coming in that they would cut under their 20 per cent. across-the-board cuts plan.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): The part-time Leader of the House will be aware that last

[Tim Loughton]

night we had a lively and well-attended debate on the Laming report and the continued lack of a Green Paper on child protection. Six months have passed since the Laming committee reported, and the Government have not yet made a statement or held a debate in Government time. Is it not therefore adding insult to injury to read in *The Times* today that a draft copy of the Government's response has been made available to that newspaper, which recommends drastic action such as the phasing out of child protection registers? Given that we have been calling for the immediate publication of the Green Paper, will the right hon. Gentleman at least publish the draft Green Paper, which, apparently, the press can have? Given that he made no mention of the Green Paper in his timetable for the week when we come back in September, despite the fact that the Secretary of State for Education and Skills promised it on the first day back, will he guarantee that there will be an oral statement by the Minister for Children or by her superiors, if the hon. Lady is still in place at that stage, so that Members will have the opportunity to ask those questions that we have been asking for the past six months, to which we have failed to get any answers?

Mr. Hain: I have not read *The Times* this morning, though I plan to do so on my way home later today; it is a very good newspaper. The proposition that the Government should publish or bring to the House draft reports—

Mr. Forth: Leak.

Mr. Hain: Newspapers are quite enterprising operations and find all sorts of drafts lying in photocopiers, and so on. The proposition is ridiculous and shows how unfit the Conservatives are for government.

On the substance of the matter, after the recess it is the Government's intention to bring forward the paper as published on children's rights. It will be the most comprehensive policy ever brought forward by any Government on children's rights and protection. Of course there will be a statement.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): My right hon. Friend will be well aware of the warm welcome given to the strong statement of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister about the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi by the Burmese Government, a Government who still have close trading partnerships with a major British company. Since then, despite further pressure by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, British American Tobacco has not yet taken a decision to disinvest. Will my right hon. Friend urge the Prime Minister to find time, when we return in the autumn, to bring forward powers similar to those that have been introduced in America, virtually unanimously by both Houses of Congress, to ban all trading relationships, including agreements between British companies and the Burmese regime?

Mr. Hain: I very much agree with my hon. Friend that the Burmese regime is one of the most odious in the world. The sanctions on it, which the Government support, will continue until it frees the people of Burma and their brilliant leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. It is important that the sanctions are taken forward. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade and Investment met representatives of British American Tobacco and urged them to abide by the sanctions, and I hope that they will.

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on employment rights, particularly to safeguard those workers who face discrimination based on their sexuality? Early-day motion 1585 condemns the treatment of Canon Jeffrey John at the hands of a bunch of bigots in the Church of England. Will the right hon. Gentleman join me in condemning those people?

[That this House condemns the appalling homophobia in the Church of England which has forced the proposed Bishop of Reading, Canon Jeffrey John, to stand down; believes that in the 21st century such open prejudice should not be tolerated anywhere; and expresses its real disappointment in the Archbishop of Canterbury for failing to stand up to this bigotry. face discrimination based on their sexuality?]

Mr. Hain: I condemn all bigotry. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the bigotry that was released around that unhappy episode. He has the opportunity to apply for a debate in the normal way.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): As the newly appointed commander-in-chief of coalition forces has stated that, far from being over, the war in Iraq has moved into a classic guerrilla mode, will the House be recalled should the situation in Iraq deteriorate during the recess, necessitating the possible deployment of additional British troops?

Mr. Hain: The House will be aware that September sittings should alleviate the necessity for requesting a recall. I do not envisage that it will be necessary to recall the House on Iraq or on any other matter. Should such an eventuality arise, the option remains open.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): May we have a debate on hospices, so we might reveal that Government funding of adult hospices is 28 per cent., of children's hospices it is 5 per cent. and at Little Haven children's hospice in my constituency, it is 2.8 per cent? The Government cannot hide behind primary care trust decisions. The Government should take responsibility for the palliative care of these children at a devastating time in their lives. They should come forward with a policy on this matter.

Mr. Hain: I commend the hon. Gentleman for raising the matter. I share with him support and admiration for the work that is done by hospices. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will have noted carefully what he said.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Will my right hon. Friend find time after the recess for an important debate on what could be a far-reaching change in the practice of the House, namely the publication of the Senior Salaries Review Body's report on the payment of Select Committee Chairs? In that debate, is there likely to be

an opportunity for my right hon. Friend to consider whether House Chairs should be paid? I hesitate to say this, but given that I am retiring at the next general election, I have no long-term interest in whether the Speaker's Panel should be considered in this regard.

Mr. Hain: We all regret the fact that my hon. Friend is retiring at that next election, as he has been a valuable servant of the House and, indeed, currently serves with distinction on the Chairmen's Panel. We published this morning in the proper way the SSRB report on that matter. It is important that we value the work of Select Committees and recognise the contribution of their Chairmen. The creation of a career path on the Back Benches has been recommended by numerous academics, commentators and independent studies. The Hansard Society commission and the Conservative party's own commission on strengthening Parliament both recommended that the chairmen of investigative committees be paid a salary equivalent to that of a Minister. Indeed, Jeremy Paxman advocated that path, so the policy must surely commend itself to the House. As for the Chairmen's Panel, its members do a very good job and put in a lot of hard work, and we will have to consider the matter. There is also the question of the Chairmen of Domestic Committees, who are not covered by the SSRB report.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Two weeks ago, I asked the Prime Minister about the implications of the Sally Clark and Trupti Patel cases. Today, he has written to me with important new details about the way in which the Government will handle the aftermath of those cases including, for example, reviewing current prosecutions, setting up a group to look at previous convictions of people currently in prison and, indeed, producing a new code of practice for pathologists. That is all welcome stuff, but does the Leader of the House agree, given the enormous public concern about those cases, that there should be a statement or debate when we return after the recess so that we can press the Solicitor-General in greater detail about some of those issues?

Mr. Hain: I agree that those issues are important. I will bring the matter quite properly raised by the hon. Gentleman to the attention of those concerned.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): In previous answers, my right hon. Friend seemed to accept that reform of the House of Lords is unfinished business. Will he clarify whether the Government regard their role as assisting the process of finding an acceptable solution in this Chamber and, indeed, the House of Lords? May I put it to him that both Houses and the Government should accept that a hybrid system is good for the constitution and a good way of reaching agreement, so we ought to go down that road? Will he consult on that and enable debates to take place on it?

Mr. Hain: The Government will be considering those matters in the coming period. As soon as we are in a position to do so, having undertaken further consultations, we will come back to the House with recommendations on a way forward.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): This morning, the Select Committee on Trade and Industry published a report on post offices and the introduction of the Government's policy forcing pensioners to stop getting their benefits from the post office. That has had a devastating impact and is causing a great deal of concern among many sub-postmasters throughout the country. Is it not time that we debated that issue yet again so that the Government can respond to sub-postmasters' concerns?

Mr. Hain: I recognise the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. Obviously, as I have said in response to previous questions on this matter, local post offices have been under threat for decades because of the changing pattern of consumer behaviour. We must do everything in our power to protect them, and the important points made by the hon. Gentleman will be brought to the attention of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): The Leader of the House will be aware that the Communications Bill received Royal Assent today, but he will also be aware that one problem that the Government had during its passage was that parliamentary counsel could not recognise that the definition of a citizen included anything outside the narrow definition relating to nationality. Will he explain why that key area of the public services remains a monopoly, and why it is denied the benefits of competition enjoyed by other public services? Will he look at that as part of his modernisation proposals?

Mr. Hain: I am afraid that I am not going to give my hon. Friend an explanation in business questions, but I am sure that he can get one from the relevant Secretary of State.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Will there be an opportunity for a debate on acute hospital services in the south-west? The right hon. Gentleman may be aware that Royal United hospital, Bath, along with the Bristol hospitals have, for the second year running, received a no-star rating, despite the fact that most people agree that there is nothing wrong with their surgical, medical or nursing facilities. The problem is past management mistakes and a huge debt. Will the Secretary of State for Health come to the House and explain what he will do to put things right for the people served by hospitals in Bath and Bristol?

Mr. Hain: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that he has an opportunity to raise these matters in an Adjournment debate, but meanwhile I shall certainly bring his point to the attention of the Secretary of State for Health. However, in the interests of fairness, he will acknowledge that there is now record investment in the health service, and that more nurses and doctors are being recruited than ever before. There are record real-terms increases in health care, reversing decades of underinvestment and underspending on health by the Conservatives.

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): My right hon. Friend will be aware that many Members have recently been lobbied by members of the Trade Justice Movement, who are particularly worried about

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the summit in Cancun in September. Will he make time in the House for a statement and discussion on the debate in Cancun?

Mr. Hain: I shall certainly look at that. The Government attach a lot of significance to the issue, as does my hon. Friend, and share his view that the objective of achieving trade justice is an important one. We will work to achieve that objective, and shall obviously report to the House in the normal way.

School Funding

1.15 pm

Mr. Charles Clarke: Mr. Speaker, with permission I would like to make a statement about the funding of schools in the years 2004–05 and 2005–06.

I begin with an assessment of the changes that have taken place in the past six years. Our country now has the best results at ages 11, 14, 16 and 18. We have tackled the shameful neglect of our school buildings and, by 2005–06, we will be investing over £5 billion in repairs and new buildings. We have delivered major increases in school spending, and school funding is up by more than 25 per cent. in real terms per pupil. It is no secret where the money has gone. We now have 25,000 more teachers and 80,000 more support staff than in 1997. Moreover, teachers' pay has improved significantly. For example, in 1997, a teacher with six years' experience received £20,040, while their counterpart today will, from September, receive £26,460, which is a real-terms increase of 13 per cent. We have also started down the road to a fundamental improvement in teachers' work load and working arrangements. Those are all achievements of which teachers, heads, governors, local and central Government can be proud.

There is no doubt, however, that many schools have experienced real difficulties this year with their budget allocations. As I set out in my oral evidence to the Select Committee on Education and Skills earlier this week, a wide range of factors contributed to that situation. I will not repeat them here, but I wish to put on record my appreciation for the hard work of head teachers and local education authorities across the country in coping with those difficulties and continuing to improve the quality of education provided by their schools.

In my statement on 15 May, I said that I would keep the House informed of my thinking, and give head teachers and LEAs early indications of our approach to help them begin planning for next year. My purpose today is to outline the first steps that we are taking to respond to schools' practical concerns about the present system. Following continuing consultation with representatives of local authorities, chief education officers and head teachers, I will make a further report to the House in the autumn. My guiding principles on the changes needed in the schools funding system for the next two years are as follows. First, every school should receive at least a guaranteed per pupil increase in funding for each year. Secondly, central and local government should make earlier announcements of the financial allocations to schools so that heads have greater certainty and time to plan. Thirdly, we should provide greater stability through a two-year settlement on teachers' pay, ring-fenced grants and the guaranteed per pupil increase in school funding. Fourthly, there should be greater transparency in the overall system of funding for schools. Finally, the reforms agreed with the key work force partners, as reflected in the national agreement on raising standards and tackling work load, should be sustained.

The Government have been working intensively to identify a package of measures that will deliver those aims. This year, my Department provided a guaranteed minimum increase in the education formula allocations for each local education authority. In 2004–05 and

2005–06, I intend to go a stage further. My central proposal for each of these two years is to provide a guarantee at the level of the individual school, so every school will receive at least a minimum increase in its funding per pupil. Of course, many schools will receive more than this minimum. We intend to implement that through fair funding regulations, placing each local education authority under a direct obligation to provide for such a minimum guarantee. I will confirm the minimum percentage increases for 2004–05 and, provisionally, for 2005–06, by the time of the provisional local government finance settlement in November, when we have completed our analysis of costs in the system, in particular, on teachers' pay. We will share that analysis, and the rationale for the level of the minimum percentage increase, with our education partners.

This guarantee will provide for a minimum funding increase in every school. That minimum will be based on the average cost pressures for 2004–05 and 2005–06. Obviously, it cannot match the precise composition of each school's current spending profile. For example, it cannot insulate schools from the effects of changes in their pupil numbers, or reflect their wide range of different staffing arrangements. Heads and governors will continue to need to plan ahead, with their LEAs, to take account of those features that are specific to every school, but I believe that our average per pupil guarantee will give schools a far more stable foundation.

We are already discussing with our education partners how the guarantee will work in detail, and we will consult further. We will seek to agree guidelines to underpin the operation of these new arrangements, in order, for instance, to take proper account of the extra protection that LEAs already provide to very small schools. Within this framework, LEAs, heads and governors will work together through their schools forums to agree the funding baseline to which the guaranteed per pupil increase will be applied.

For sixth forms, the Learning and Skills Council will, in both the 2004–05 and 2005–06 school years, provide each school with guaranteed minimum increases in funding equivalent to the per pupil guarantee for schools. The LSC will consult all heads of maintained schools with sixth forms in the autumn on its plans for improving the operation of sixth form funding for 2004–05.

Some schools have found it necessary this year to spend from their reserves or from devolved formula capital allocations; others have set deficit budgets by agreement with their LEAs. Of course, schools and LEAs have the primary responsibility to manage the ongoing consequences of such decisions, including maintaining sound financial management and balancing budgets. The changes that I am introducing for 2004–05 and 2005–06 will help them to do so. However, I recognise that there may be some cases where doing so could be beyond the capacity of individual schools and LEAs. In those few cases, I will be prepared to consider limited, transitional support to avoid damage to children's education, where that is part of a locally agreed recovery plan between the LEA, schools and the Department. I shall discuss with head teachers and local authority representatives how best to provide such support.

Of course, the minimum guarantee that I am offering today to schools can be fulfilled only by ensuring that each LEA has the necessary resources within its schools budget. There are two key elements. First, in both 2004–05 and 2005–06, I will set the minimum increase for schools formula spending share—SFSS—in each authority at a level that will cover the school level guarantee and provide the headroom necessary to enable the local fair funding formula to work, and to help provide transitional support to individual schools, where necessary. Secondly, we will ensure that the local authority receives sufficient central Government grant to passport in full the increase in SFSS into its schools budget.

The Government will also provide additional resources for other local services, including children's social services, which are now my responsibility, over and above those announced for them in the last spending review. That will help to ensure that the arrangements I am announcing today do not create difficulties for other local services. The details will be announced in the autumn. Having provided these resources, the Government are determined that each and every school should benefit in the way intended.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and I will write to every local education authority setting out the Government's clear expectation that, barring wholly exceptional circumstances, each and every LEA should passport the full increase in its SFSS into a matching increase in the schools budget. That is essential if heads, governors, teachers and parents are to have full confidence that the resources intended for schools will indeed get through to schools. I have statutory powers to require LEAs to set a minimum schools budget, and I will be prepared to use those powers where it is necessary to do so.

This year most LEAs' spending on centrally funded pupil services, such as special educational needs and excluded pupils, has increased significantly faster than their spending on budgets delegated to individual schools. It is essential that, in future, the individual schools budget receive its fair share of any increase, so my intention is that, in 2004–05 and 2005–06, spending on such central items should rise no faster than spending on the individual schools budget. I will consult on how fair funding regulations can ensure that this is delivered. In doing so, I will take account of the need for local flexibility on items such as the expansion of nursery provision to meet the Government's commitments.

It is clear that a significant source of problems for some schools this year has been the changes in the standards fund. I will help to provide stability and security by maintaining and inflation-proofing the support that the standards fund provides to schools at its 2003–04 levels. That means that I am reversing the reductions previously announced for standards fund support to schools in 2004–05 and 2005–06. That will provide more than £400 million in each of the next two years, over and above existing plans. I will also be making earlier announcements on standards fund distribution, before the announcement of the provisional local government finance settlement.

I am able to make such additional funding available from my end year flexibility, and other redirection of existing resources. I set out for the House in my Department's annual report the planned and prudent

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use of accumulated end year flexibility over the next three years to supplement resources secured through the spending review. This additional commitment means that my accumulated end year flexibility is now fully committed to support children, young people and adults in achieving their full potential.

Head teachers should know their budgets in good time for the beginning of the financial year. I am taking a number of steps to provide earlier notification of their funding. As well as earlier notification on the standards fund, the Government will bring forward the date of the provisional local government settlement to the middle of November. We also intend to bring forward the date by which local authorities are obliged to notify me of their passporting intentions by one month to the end of December, and the Government will propose an appropriate amendment to the Local Government Bill on Third Reading in another place.

It is vital that the reforms that we agreed with key work force partners, as reflected in our national agreement on raising standards and tackling work load, are sustainable. That remains a key priority for my Department. By maintaining the standards fund at its current level, we will help to ensure that schools receive the core funding that they need to make progress on implementing the work force agreement.

On 11 July, I submitted my evidence to the School Teachers Review Body. That evidence makes the case for a two-and-a-half-year settlement on the basis of current targets for inflation. I have set out a clear strategy to enable sensible progression along the upper pay scale while controlling the costs, and I have asked the STRB to report on all the major issues in early November, so that LEAs and schools will have much earlier certainty about the level of pay cost pressures for the next two years.

This year's problems have underlined the need to provide more and better support for schools and LEAs in planning and managing resources, and for schools forums, which have a key role to play in helping to secure local consensus on distribution. We will be discussing with education partners, the National College for School Leadership and others how best we can make rapid progress.

Finally, I want to make it clear that this package is designed to secure stability and restore confidence in our funding arrangements for schools. We need to ensure that the schools funding system commands broad support, works to promote our overall objectives for raising standards in education, and so ensures that resources are used in the most effective way to secure higher quality and better levels of achievement in schools. I will, of course, be monitoring the impact of the changes I am announcing today, with a view to considering whether further changes are needed for 2005–06. It is critical to ensure that funding arrangements for schools are sustainable in the long term.

I recognise that this has been a difficult year. However, I believe that the steps I have outlined today provide a realistic framework of stability and certainty for the next two years. We will work with LEAs and schools, within the framework I have set out today, to deliver the further improvements our children deserve. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I am, as always, grateful to the Secretary of State for giving me advance sight of his statement.

The crisis that has caused the Secretary of State to come to the House with this statement has been both unnecessary and hugely damaging to our schools. Twelve months ago, his predecessor presented the Government's plans for education spending as a triumph. Six months ago, it was obvious to heads, teachers and parents across the country that the reality was cuts, redundancies and disappointment. For those six months, the Government have turned all their energy on a hunt not for a solution, but for a scapegoat. They tried blaming local authorities and they have even tried blaming heads for paying teachers too much.

The ludicrous nature of that attempt to shift the blame from the Department, where it belongs, has finally been revealed today, when we learn that the Secretary of State's Department underspent by £846 million last year. So hundreds of teachers are being made redundant while his Department is sitting on the money that could have kept them in work. He referred charmingly to his accumulated end-year flexibility. Can he explain what is more urgent in his budget than stopping teachers being made redundant?

The statement contains some detailed proposals that improve the current system. Bringing forward the date on which the School Teachers Review Body reports and the local government settlement so that schools' budgets may be set earlier will be helpful. But quite apart from the point about whether that is an adequate response to the crisis, there are key questions about the Government's own behaviour. One important point that the Secretary of State has made this morning is that he is recentralising, after last year's short flirtation with trusting local government. More of the pot of money will come from his Department in future, but does he not recognise that it is often his own Department that is the cause of the delays? Some schools do not know what money they will receive from the standards fund until well after they have set their budgets. He has tried to reassure them today. Can he give the House a guarantee that individual schools will know the amount of centrally distributed money that they are to receive before they have to set their budgets?

Even more importantly, what will the Secretary of State do about the Government's besetting sin—trying to do the jobs of heads and governors for them? He will know the widespread view in our schools that the standards fund money is too often an excuse to tie schools up in a web of bidding and form filling to meet the needs of the latest ministerial initiative rather than of our children's education. If more money is coming directly from the Department, what does he propose to do about that micro-management?

The most obvious gap in the statement is the absence of any hard numbers. Today, schools are going into deficit, cutting their capital budgets and sacking teachers. They want to know what their position will be next year. Nothing that the Secretary of State has said clears that up. He has promised what he called a

minimum funding increase guarantee for schools next year. But this year, according to the comprehensive spending review, there was a real terms increase of 3.4 per cent., and yet we have had the crisis. So is he promising more than 3.4 per cent. next year? Is he also promising that the increase will meet all the extra costs that Government impose on schools? Will it meet the added costs for schools that have gone into deficit this year or that have spent their capital budget on revenue spending? If it does not do so, we will be back here next year with a repeat crisis.

Will the Secretary of State also clear up what he means by an increase in funding? Funding sounds like it means a grant from central to local government to pay for schools. However, as he knows, in the arcane and rarefied world of local government finance, it can also mean the schools formula spending share, which is simply a theoretical estimate of what each council should spend. If all he is going to do is announce a big figure for that estimate that is not accompanied by the money from his Department, which is what he did to many LEAs this year, he will provoke a repeat crisis, with cuts in schools and a sterile argument between central and local government about whose fault it is. His words in this area were carefully opaque. Can he clear up the question whether the grant will meet not only the increase in the SFFS that he mentioned, but the backlog that so many LEAs have faced and has caused the crisis this year?

The statement also appears to threaten the provision of spending on children with special educational needs and on the rescue services for pupils who have been excluded. I really cannot believe that he means to restrict spending specifically in those areas, where the most vulnerable children will be worst affected. Can he confirm what he appeared to suggest—that he intends to take powers to himself to stop local authorities spending too much on children with special needs?

The Government will not be forgiven by parents and teachers for failing to cope with this year's funding crisis. This statement is designed to prevent another crisis next year. What the Secretary of State has to offer is greater predictability. Of course, predictability is good in itself, but if we discover in the autumn that schools are able to look two years ahead and simply predict more misery, cuts and redundancies, this year's level of anger will be multiplied, and this Government will go down as the Government who betrayed our schools.

Mr. Clarke: I have to say that there was very little substance in those remarks. Let us get the facts clear. First, I am announcing today more money for schools throughout Britain in both 2004–05 and 2005–06. Secondly, I am absolutely clear that we need to ensure that the money that is allocated to local education authorities for schools is spent on them, so that money gets there in the right way. Thirdly, I am absolutely clear and I have announced today that the increase in expenditure between individual schools and central budgets should be balanced so that schools themselves get the resources that they need in an effective way.

I am also clear from what the hon. Gentleman said that there is no commitment of any description from the Opposition to any level of funding increase whatever. Indeed, judging by the rhetoric of his party in the past, its commitment is to reduce funding on schools, and I think that we should take that into account in considering what it has to say.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about numbers. It would indeed be foolhardy to offer numbers to schools when we do not know the level of the teachers' pay settlement, which forms such a substantial amount of any expenditure. That is why the commitment that I give is to make that announcement when we know the teachers' pay settlement following the proper review that has been set up. I think that that is an entirely correct approach. There is new money for schools in this approach in order precisely to give the confidence and stability that the system needs.

I acknowledge—this is the one point that I acknowledge from what the hon. Gentleman said—that my Department needs to improve its practice on the allocation of standards fund information in good time. That is why I said that we would provide that information much earlier in the year than traditionally so that both schools and local education authorities can know better where they are. We are not interested in micro-managing schools' budgets. What we are interested in doing is ensuring that schools have enough money to take the decisions that they have to take to enhance education opportunities for themselves.

I am proud of the announcement that we are making today. I think that it can offer the stability that is needed and that everybody will observe what has been said by the hon. Gentleman and notice the enormous hole at the centre of what the Conservative party has to say.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): May I give my right hon. Friend's statement a cautious welcome? It seems to address the major points of concern that we in the Select Committee on Education and Skills were putting to him only this week, so I give it a guarded and cautious welcome. It is a complex statement and we will want to go away and pore over it in some detail. There was an element of concern as he touched on special educational needs and pupil referral units, and on whether schools will be able to decide how much they spend on those matters.

Overall, I give the statement a cautious welcome. My right hon. Friend seems to have hit the three main targets. Let us make sure that the Government are really on target when we consider the statement a little more closely.

Mr. Clarke: I am very grateful for my hon. Friend's remarks. As he says, this is a complex matter, and that is why I appreciate the detailed study that his Select Committee has made of this issue. I look forward to hearing any comments that he wishes to make once he has had the chance to have a considered look at the detail of the statement, but I appreciate the remarks that he has made at this stage.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I thank the Secretary of State for the advance copy of his statement, but he ought to be ashamed of the cowardly way in which he sneaked it out on the very day that schools go into recess for the summer, when they can do absolutely nothing about it.

To date, the Secretary of State and his Ministers have arrogantly tried to blame everyone for this crisis but themselves. He told us in April that local authorities had

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stuffed £500 million down the backs of their sofas. He said in the Select Committee on Education and Skills that head teachers were incompetent for not managing their budgets. His latest excuse was that teachers are being paid too much. When the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) and I were at the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers' conference in April, we were told that we were scaremongering, and that that was why schools did not get the budgets that they need.

Today, we heard not a single word of humility from the Secretary of State about the chaos that has been caused. He was not able to name a single local education authority that has not satisfied his Department about its allocation or passporting of money to schools. At the Local Government Association conference in July, Barnaby Shaw, the Department's school improvement and excellence manager, said:

"When you try to analyse what went wrong, the fault lies with the DfES."

That is one of the Secretary of State's senior officials. Does he agree with him? Does he agree with the Deputy Prime Minister, who, at the same conference, accused him of exacerbating the situation with ill-thought-out statements?

Today's statement is also ill thought out. Will the Secretary of State confirm that not a single teacher or classroom assistant who is made redundant today will be re-employed as a result of it? Will he confirm that no additional resources will be given to schools with deficit budgets that have used all their balances or devolved their capital unless they are part of the recovery plan? Will he confirm that the recovery plan is in fact a loan that schools will have to pay back? Will he agree that when he appeared before the Select Committee on Monday, he let the cat out of the bag by saying that schools with insufficient resources will not be able to implement the work load agreement within the relevant time scale?

We welcome some aspects of the statement, including the longer-term settlement, the prospect of a two-year pay deal, and guaranteed per-student increases; but that is what the Secretary of State promised for this year. What additional resources has he obtained from the Chancellor in support of the next two-year settlement? If he has no more money, this is a hollow promise. If he has a sealed envelope, money must come from somewhere else to pay for the real increases that he has guaranteed. Who will be the new losers in this settlement? What plans has he actively to model the proposals at a school level? To be fair to the Secretary of State, we are pleased that he is going to bring forward the School Teachers Review Body process and that local authorities will have all the information before them. His ministerial colleagues refused to do that during the passage of the School Standards Bill, even though we proposed amendments that would achieve it. Does the Secretary of State accept that this year's transfer of standards fund money was in reality a sleight of hand by which he removed £350 million? That had a severe impact, especially on newly qualified teachers.

Finally, will the Secretary of State abandon the ludicrous idea of individually funding 25,000 schools? As we have seen this year, he is not competent to run his own Department, let alone 25,000 schools. When he lounges on the beach somewhere in Europe this summer, he may be reminded of the hundreds of teachers and classroom assistants who are being made redundant and will have to find jobs elsewhere.

Mr. Clarke: Perhaps I could visit the hon. Gentleman in Harrogate this summer and lounge on the beach while I consider what to do. On the other hand, I might find that people come up and shout at me, having been inspired by the hon. Gentleman.

I am delighted by hon. Gentleman's warm welcome for the substance of our proposals, particularly on the two-year deal, the standards fund and the extra resources. It is a shame, however, that he had to hide it under a great shower of rhetoric that did not add up to much.

I have acknowledged throughout, and continue to do so, that mistakes were made in relation to the shared responsibility of my Department and local government for funding schools. I have said that in this House and in the Select Committee, and I have sought to analyse why and how it happened. It is precisely because we need to rectify those mistakes that I am making this statement. It is important that schools are well managed—that is why recovery plans to deal with deficit budgets and suchlike are necessary. It is not the case that a tap of money is turned on and schools spend, spend, spend. The situation has to be well managed and well directed, and that is what we will do. We are modelling the proposals in detail; I was at pains to point out the various consultations that I intend to have with local government, head teachers and others.

On the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the funding formula, it is not necessary to withdraw a proposal that I never made.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, which contains much to encourage us. I particularly thank him for the additional money for children's social services, as we had been greatly concerned that that might be badly affected by his ring-fencing. Can he clarify how the baselines will be established? Many schools are adopting deficit budgets, and unless they get back to where they should have been, an increase for 2004–05 will not be sufficient and may lead to redundancies, which we have managed to stave off for the moment.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's general support. Having discussed the situation with many of her colleagues in the London borough of Lewisham, I am well aware of the pressures that her local schools have experienced. I want to make two points in response. First, I have been told by many schools, governors and local education authorities that the single most important thing to sort out at this stage is certainty about the future and stability. That is what I sought to offer in the statement.

Secondly, I acknowledge what my hon. Friend says—we have discussed it outside this Chamber—about schools that have spent from reserves or from devolved formula capital, or where deficit budgets have been set. I also acknowledge that in some cases resolving those issues could be beyond the capacity of individual

schools and LEAs. In those few cases, I will be prepared to consider limited transitional support to avoid damage to children's education and consequences such as those that my hon. Friend describes. However, that must be part of a locally agreed recovery plan. The local authority—in her case, Lewisham—and schools must discuss among themselves then agree with us, a plan that will deal with such problems. That is the responsible approach, and it allows stability for the future.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): The Secretary of State is welcome to come to the Isle of Wight to lounge on the beaches, where he might meet the 40 or so staff who have lost their jobs as a result of this year's schools funding crisis. He said in his statement: "LEAs, heads and governors will work together through their schools forums to agree the funding baseline to which the guaranteed per pupil increase will be applied." Does that mean that this year's increase might be based not on the actual funding, but on a lower figure?

Mr. Clarke: That depends entirely on pupil numbers and the overall situation. I accept that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) said, there are issues involving deficit budgets. We will take those into account in the way that I set out.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): In warmly welcoming my right hon. Friend's statement, I suggest that he needs not only to ensure that there is a stable and predictable funding system in future, but to provide ample flexibility for individual schools to experiment with new teaching methods and innovative use of resources on their premises. In that context, I commend to him the online learning system that is being pioneered by Manor college of technology in Hartlepool. The point is that without greater freedom and flexibility being permitted for individual schools, such innovative teaching advances are likely to remain restricted in the future.

Mr. Clarke: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend, which is why I so energetically rebut the suggestion from the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman that I am interested in micro-managing schools. The truth is exactly as my right hon. Friend says: not only Manor college in his constituency but a large number of schools in the country are behaving in an innovatory way in an entirely outstanding application, for example, of information and communications technology, with different partnerships outside the school, which is all focused on raising educational standards. That can be done only if there is freedom and flexibility at the school level. That is what this statement is designed to offer.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): As many Worcestershire schools have welcomed the increased capital money made available by the Government to local schools, I am sure that they will welcome aspects of today's statement. They will be concerned, however, that the Government have brought forward no proposals at all to address the growing gap between Worcestershire's funding and the English national funding average, despite teachers being paid on a national pay scale. When will the Government address the iniquity of schools in similar situations in similar local education authorities getting wildly different sums of money, which is forcing counties such as Worcestershire to charge their council tax payers considerably more than the Government think that they need to?

Mr. Clarke: I, too, represent a shire county in which the kind of issues that the hon. Gentleman raises are real. We have asked the School Teachers Review Body this year to look at whether there is a case for regional variations and so on, which is part of my remit letter that I published last Friday. To be blunt, the key area in which that is so important is London and the south-east, where there is already a whole system of extra pay to deal with those circumstances. It is a bigger factor there than in some other parts of the country, including Worcestershire. It is important to make an assessment, however, for the reasons that he states.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Could my right hon. Friend help me by giving a little more detail about how the budgets for the following years will be defined? Despite my local authority, Camden, passporting all Government money to our schools, and despite finding an additional £1.8 million from other budgets for education, it is still facing a shortfall of £1.5 million. That is resulting in a loss of teachers and classroom assistants, deficit budgets, of which there have been 14 to date, and capital projects are being lost as well as certain educational programmes. Will he help me by saying what will be the minimum budget, given that there can be no argument that Camden has always passported, and will continue to passport, all Government money, and has always found additional funds for education?

Mr. Clarke: I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to Camden council, which has had substantial discussions with my officials and schools within the borough to address the problems there. As she knows, Camden is relatively well funded, being the seventh highest-funded education authority in Britain, but it has had serious issues that it has been seeking to address in a constructive way. For the reasons that I gave earlier, I am not prepared to put a figure on the amount of money that we are talking about until we know the pay review body settlement in particular, because that will be important. One of the issues this year was that the pay review body recommended, and I then agreed, a significantly greater pay increase in inner London, in boroughs such as Camden, than across the country, for the reasons that were referred to in the question from the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff). I agreed that but it put greater pressures on the budgets of schools in inner London. That is why I am not prepared to give a figure for next year until we know exactly what the situation will be on teachers' pay.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Whatever the merits of the right hon. Gentleman's statement this afternoon, he seems not to have addressed the real crisis that exists at the moment. That can be no better explained than by looking at what happened in Barnet, where the Government, through the revenue support

[Sir Sydney Chapman]

grant, gave an additional £8.1 million to cover all services, but required the LEA to pass on £14.5 million to the schools, which the local education authority has done, causing a huge hike in the council tax. He has admitted that there have been failures, and that problems exist, and Barnet brought in an independent consultant who totally vindicated the LEA. Will he look at how, this year, he can immediately redress the injustice and help Barnet to cover this deepening crisis?

Mr. Clarke: As the hon. Gentleman knows, his parliamentary colleagues representing Barnet have been extremely energetic in making precisely the case that he sets out. I and my colleagues have been ready to meet colleagues from Barnet to discuss the situation, and continue to be ready to discuss it in every way that is appropriate. I remain of the view that the security and certainty that I am offering in this statement is a major means to resolving the issues of funding in the current year, including in schools in Barnet. That is why I commend my proposals to the schools and local education authority in Barnet, as well as more widely.

Bob Russell (Colchester): Does the Secretary of State recall his visit last month to Colchester when, as the *Evening Gazette* graphically reported, large sums of money were pledged? In particular, will he give a guarantee today that those schools that draw a large number of children from the Army estates will receive additional funding for the turbulence factor, which he led all those head teachers whom he met to believe would be forthcoming? Given his statement today, will he guarantee that the money for state schools that cater for service children will be provided?

Mr. Clarke: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I had a constructive meeting with the heads of the schools around the Army base in Colchester to discuss precisely the issues that he describes. In short, the problem is that when garrisons move, and therefore families move, that can cause instability in the numbers in a particular school. This statement does not address that point because it is not about pupil numbers. The commitment that I gave to those head teachers—I give him the assurance that I continue to give—is that we are addressing the 250 schools altogether in the country that have that problem as garrisons move around, and we are discussing with the Ministry of Defence and others how we can give such schools the kind of stability that they seek.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I straightforwardly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. He is absolutely right that there is too much brokerage as the money finds its way to schools. He is also right that the single most important cause of the difficulties that schools face is the cut in the standards fund, which was itself suggested by local government. He is right to reverse that, and I congratulate him on charming £400 million extra out of Prudence to support the reintroduction of the standards fund. Will he ensure, however, that the recovery plans, the changes in local formulae for distributing money to schools and the future distribution of the standards fund are all properly consulted on locally in good time, so that everyone can see exactly what is going on and that there is fairness not favours?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's warm remarks, and I can give him the assurance that he seeks that the result of this will be to give clarity to every school about what the funding regime is. One of the relatively few silver linings that emerged from the grey cloud of funding this year was a much closer relationship in most parts of the country between the local education authority and the schools within that area, and a more serious debate about where resources were really being allocated. I believe that my statement today will accelerate that process.

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): On average, in Southend, secondary schools have faced a funding shortage of £400,000 and primary schools of £50,000. In the light of the Secretary of State's statement today, will his officials kindly liaise urgently with officials in Southend to see whether the redundancy notices that were planned should not be sent out, preferably before the meeting with the Minister for School Standards on 9 September?

Mr. Clarke: I am happy to confirm that my officials would be very happy to meet the officials of the local education authority to discuss those points.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for the useful meeting that Leicestershire MPs had with him earlier this week. Will he use the flexibility that is possible in what he said today to address the situation that was mentioned earlier by the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), which is the gap in funding between the best and worst funded local education authorities. I know that he was able to allow some flexibility this year, with an additional £835,000 for the county when a shortfall was highlighted. Will he use that in his talks with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to look again at the area cost adjustment to help reduce the enormous gap that has opened up? I very much welcome the other steps that he is taking in today's statement.

Mr. Clarke: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for those remarks. We had a very useful discussion with him and his colleagues from Leicestershire earlier this week, and I can confirm that I and my colleagues in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will continue to discuss these matters.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): The Secretary of State said in an earlier answer that mistakes had been made. When we have a fiasco like this before us on the Public Accounts Committee, Members from all parties often put to the permanent secretary the question that I would now like to put to the Secretary of State. How many Ministers or civil servants have lost their jobs as a result of this fiasco?

Mr. Clarke: None, and I do not intend that any should.

Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his openness at this early stage; we

are now giving some clarity to the schools system. I remind him that the importance of the standards fund—as I know he recognises—was that it precisely targeted the most disadvantaged pupils in the most disadvantaged communities, and that it undid some of the great damage done by the previous Conservative Government. Will he make it clear how far we are able to tell such schools that next year they will have budgets that allow them to operate in the same way as last year?

Mr. Clarke: I think that we can be sure that schools can operate in that way. In so saying, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work that he has done with schools in central Manchester to improve the situation there. It was the evidence that he and his colleagues brought to me about the impact of the reductions in the standards fund on some of his schools, in the most challenging circumstances, that convinced me that the course of action that I am announcing today—to reverse the proposed cuts in the standards fund—is necessary to give the kind of assurance that he seeks.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Six long years after the Prime Minister promised to make education his top three priorities, can the Secretary of State look you in the eye and tell the House that that promise has been fulfilled—or even, Mr. Speaker, look you in the eye and tell the House that that promise has been fulfilled?

Mr. Clarke: Yes I can, Mr. Speaker, for the reasons that I have set out in the statement in terms of increased resources, teachers, classroom assistants and teachers' pay, and of better results and outcomes. The contrast with the Conservative years of the past could not be greater.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I note that my right hon. Friend's statement refers to increased funding for sixth formers in sixth forms attached to maintained schools. I do not have such a sixth form in my constituency, but I have a sixth-form college. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that the differential funding between pupils in sixth-form colleges and those to which I have already referred will be levelled out as soon as possible?

Mr. Clarke: It is true that the essence of this statement has been about the funding of schools, rather than of colleges, whether sixth-form colleges, tertiary colleges or general further education colleges. I can confirm, however, that it is the Government's intention directly to reduce the gaps in funding that exist between schools and colleges when educating sixth formers. That remains one of our priorities.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I thank the Secretary of State for receiving a cross-party delegation of Members from Leicestershire on Tuesday to discuss the worst crisis that we have ever had in education in the county. Is it not a fact that 40 to 50 per cent. of our schools now run deficit budgets, and that the Secretary of State is directly responsible for that? Will he tell the House whether the limited transitional resources to which he has referred will be applied to Leicestershire in the short term? Although he says that he is not going to micro-manage schools' budgets, is it not a fact that he is thinking of directing LEAs on how and where they should spend the money in their budgets?

Mr. Clarke: The principal direction that I am offering is that there should be a minimum increase per pupil for every school. I think that most people in the House will welcome that direction and say that it offers the kind of stability that it would have been good to have had in the past. On the hon. Gentleman's more general point, I think that people sometimes have very short memories. In his own constituency in Leicestershire, there are now more teachers, better-paid teachers, better results, and more classroom assistants. The Government whom he supported did nothing for those people.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): My right hon. Friend will be aware, following my meeting with the Minister for Children, my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge), that Hemel Hempstead is facing particular problems at the moment because of the huge cut in courses available at the local further education college. Schools in the area will need a considerable increase in their facilities to compensate for this. Will my right hon. Friend give me the assurance that, when schools face pressures of this kind, his funding arrangements will be adequate?

Mr. Clarke: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. In fact, one of the specific mandates of the learning and skills councils is to address the relationship in 16-plus education between schools, sixth-form colleges, general colleges and so on, in a way that will address the issue that my hon. Friend has raised.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Assuming that LEAs passport funds as required, how will today's proposals help schools in the lowest-funded authorities such as Poole and Dorset? Guaranteed percentage increases on a low base will not be enough to stave off crises in the future.

Mr. Clarke: There will be enough to achieve a guaranteed per pupil increase for every school in Poole. I know that there have been problems in Poole, and a delegation has met my right hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards to discuss them. The decisions that I have been able to announce today on the standards fund will assist schools in Poole and also in other parts of the country.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I remind him that schools in my constituency and in many other metropolitan districts in the north of England suffered deficit budgets, year on year, for every year of the old Tory funding formula. Is it not the case that the introduction of a floor for the increase in spending for each individual school will impact on the pace at which the floors and ceilings for each local authority's spending can be phased out? Will my right hon. Friend tell the House how long it will now take to phase out those floors and ceilings?

Mr. Clarke: I cannot give my hon. Friend that information until we have the figures later in the year. I can, however, confirm that his central point is correct.

[Mr. Clarke]

That is why I have worked so hard to ensure that I could make this statement today on the extra money for the standards fund, so that there would not be such an impact on the floors and ceilings as there would otherwise have been, thus ensuring that schools in his constituency and others will be able to benefit to the greatest possible extent. I shall, however, give him the detailed answer that he wants when we publish the figures based on the School Teachers Review Body report.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The Secretary of State will be aware that this year Essex had the toughest grant settlement of any county in England. Bearing that in mind, this seems to be a complex statement, and I suspect that the devil will probably be in the detail. Will the right hon. Gentleman give the House an assurance that whatever guarantees he is offering will be fully funded by central Government, so that no unfair burden is placed on local council tax payers to finance them?

Mr. Clarke: I can give that assurance. I have visited Essex, as the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) said, on a couple of occasions. My journey from Norwich to London takes me through Essex, and, rather than just looking from a distance, I prefer to engage with the populace and to discuss these things with them. The impact of the funding formula was variable across schools, and some schools in Essex did very well out of it. My candid advice to the Conservative county council and its leader, who sits in the other place, is to make less political capital out of this issue and to focus more closely on the specific situation in the schools.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Thanks to the excellent work of teachers and head teachers in my constituency, many of those parents who are fortunate enough to be able to choose are now entrusting the education of their children to state schools rather than paying to have them educated privately. If we are to continue to accommodate and encourage this increase in demand, should we not allow the oversubscribed schools such as the Hollymount and Wimbledon Chase primary schools to expand? Should we not also ensure that schools such as Pelham and Dundonald primary schools and Raynes Park high school are no longer faced with the kind of budgetary pressures that they have faced this year? Will my right hon. Friend undertake to work with me, the schools and the local authority to tackle these problems and to get to the bottom of why they have arisen, so that we can ensure that the improvements that are being made can be built on in the coming years?

Mr. Clarke: I give those assurances, and will add to them. The Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg), is working hard through the London Challenge precisely to deal with the problem of over-subscribed schools and to get more flexibility in these areas. That is being done for the reasons that my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) states, and we will continue that work.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): During the Secretary of State's sojourn from the Palace of Westminster to Norwich, South, he passes through my constituency, and we were pleased to see him engaging with the populace at Loddon just the other day. Does he accept that teachers and classroom assistants in my constituency and elsewhere in Norfolk are losing their jobs? Does he also accept that it is just possible that the very complexity of the educational finance system may be part of the problem? Will he at least consider a pilot in which the money available from the state that is spent on education is given directly to parents to spend as they choose?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with the hon. Gentleman from my neighbouring constituency that the system is complex and difficult, and that it is necessary to get more clarity into it. I am not prepared to contemplate a pilot such as he described at the moment, but I suggest that he talks to his political colleagues on Norfolk county council to see whether they would consider such a step in his constituency.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, today in particular, because it helps us for the summer and perhaps messes up the Liberal Democrats' summer campaign. That apart, will he define what he means by sufficient central Government grant for next year? My authority had a £14 million passport figure, but only a £10 million increase this year. Does it mean that any passported sum will be fully funded?

Mr. Clarke: The short answer to that question is yes, but we will deal with the context and quantums later this year. I acknowledge that Brighton and Hove council has had to address a number of difficulties, and my hon. Friend has raised those with me. We will endeavour to deal with them in those circumstances.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): On the Secretary of State's stately progress from Norfolk to London, perhaps he would like to stop and visit schools in my constituency, which are running deficit budgets because they want to retain teachers, not make them redundant. He talks about a guaranteed per pupil increase for next year. Does he accept that for those schools the key concern is that it reflects not only the unavoidable additional costs in 2004–05 compared with 2003–04, but meets some of the unavoidable costs that arose in this financial year that were not covered in the settlement available to Cambridgeshire? Although Cambridgeshire passported 113 per cent. of its increase in formula, it did not make up the disparity that many schools experienced.

Mr. Clarke: In answer to previous questions, I have dealt in some detail with precisely the point that the hon. Gentleman raises, and I do not have anything further to add. If I am invited to visit his constituency, of course I will be delighted to do so.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): I apologise for being a few minutes late for my right hon. Friend's statement, but I was receiving a petition from the Tower Hamlets parents association signed by hundreds of residents. Like me, they are desperately concerned about the £5.5 million funding shortfall for education in

Tower Hamlets. I thank the Secretary of State for seeing my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Jim Fitzpatrick) and me about this problem. I particularly welcome his announcements on standards funds. What assurance can he give parents, teachers, governors and local government that schools that set a deficit budget as a result of the reduction in standards funds last year—not this year, but the 2003–04 financial year—and the increase in teachers' pay will get the additional funding they need to prevent redundancies and to set a balanced budget?

Mr. Clarke: I am aware of the issues in my hon. Friend's constituency, and I am grateful for her acknowledgement that we had a useful meeting to discuss these questions. I do not think that there is anything I can add on deficit budgets for this year, but I shall certainly take her remarks fully into account.

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): Last year, Hampshire county council received one of the lowest settlements of any local education authority, and that has contributed to some of the funding problems in local schools. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the relative shift in funding will continue next year? If so, does he recognise that that will put more pressure on local schools?

Mr. Clarke: I think that I have clarified exactly what the Government propose to do for Hampshire schools and those elsewhere in the country. Like others who have contributed to this discussion, I am a Member of Parliament for a shire county, and I acknowledge that serious issues need to be addressed. My statement offers stability to create conditions in which they can be addressed.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): As I mentioned to the Secretary of State when he carefully and courteously received a cross-party delegation of Leicestershire MPs on Tuesday, the 50 schools in north-west Leicestershire have had a difficult time as a result of this settlement, not least because of the impact of standards fund changes. Will he reassure the House that the extra £400 million per year that he is injecting into that mechanism starting next year will not be top sliced from some other educational pot, and is new money? Does he agree that the corollary to the national distribution formula reflecting economic and social need should be that the distribution mechanism within LEAs reflects the needs of individual school catchment areas?

Mr. Clarke: I can give the assurance that the extra resources that I have announced today will be targeted on the specific needs of schools. We have made that announcement to create the stability that we are seeking.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): The statement is welcome, particularly the average per pupil guarantee and the Secretary of State's decision to reverse next year's reductions in the school standards fund. I am also grateful to the Minister for School Standards for meeting a delegation of heads from Bognor Regis to discuss their funding problems. It seems that this year's problems arose from the complexity of the funding arrangements. Will the Secretary of State model these changes and the funding for each authority, as suggested by the director of education in West Sussex, so that we can be absolutely sure that this year's problems will not recur next year?

Mr. Clarke: The reason I sought Mr. Speaker's permission to make a statement today was to set out the structure and architecture of the arrangements that we will carry through. I shall announce the money when we know the result of the teachers pay review body and other matters. We will use the time between now and then to work with LEAs and schools to model the detailed impact of the changes, so that when we come to make the money announcement in the autumn it reflects the real situation and is properly prepared.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. He will know that an extra 549 teachers and teaching assistants have been appointed in Croydon since 1997, but this year we face particular difficulties. Will the transitional funding applied in exceptional circumstances for deficit funding come from his Department or from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister? How confident is he in his dialogue with the Deputy Prime Minister that enough money will be available to fund the forecasts for next year, alongside provision for other vital services, without a large increase in council tax? Will the money also fund people with special educational needs, so that they have the services that they deserve?

Mr. Clarke: I have had good discussions with the Deputy Prime Minister and with other Departments about the best way of achieving the funding. We have reached agreement, which is why I am able to make this announcement.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Treasury prior to this announcement about bypassing local authorities and funding schools from his own Department, and what was the upshot of those discussions?

Mr. Clarke: There have been substantial discussions between Ministers and officials in my Department with the Treasury. I explained the upshot of those discussions in my statement.

Personal Statement

2.18 pm

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I wish to make a personal statement with regard to a report about my conduct by the Standards and Privileges Committee. This was the first time that an MP has referred allegations about his own conduct to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. I am grateful to the Standards and Privileges Committee for authorising the Parliamentary Commissioner to investigate. I fully co-operated with the Parliamentary Commissioner's investigations.

The Parliamentary Commissioner concluded that there had been no misuse of public funds by me, and I had not used my position as an MP in any way to influence a visa decision. I wish to add that at no time did I mislead or seek to mislead a Customs official. The Standards and Privileges Committee concluded that I had made two errors of judgment. The Committee determined that the first of those required no further action, and that the second was made when I was under enormous personal pressure.

I have unreservedly apologised to the Committee, and now do so to the House, in respect of these matters. I acknowledge the full recommendations of the Committee, which I accept.

Finally, I am grateful for the tremendous support that I have received throughout recent months from family, friends, parliamentary colleagues on both sides of the House, local party members and constituents.

Point of Order

2.20 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry issued a written statement on community pharmacies which was detailed and fairly comprehensive. At the same time, the Secretary of State for Health published a document entitled "A Vision for Pharmacy in the New NHS".

As you will know, Mr. Speaker—as you are often here in the late evenings—many Members hand in petitions signed by hundreds of thousands of constituents throughout the country supporting community pharmacies and small businesses. Given the amount of public concern, and given that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said that a statement would be made before the House rose, surely the right hon. Lady owes it to the House to make an oral statement enabling us to question her on what are very technical and complicated matters. What can you do, Mr. Speaker, to urge and persuade Ministers to give us such opportunities in future?

Mr. Speaker: It is not for me to take on the responsibilities of a Back Bencher. The matter could easily be raised today during the Adjournment debates that are about to take place. That would enable the hon. Gentleman to register his complaint.

BILLS PRESENTED

Energy Efficiency

Mr. David Chaytor, supported by Mr. Martin O'Neill, Mr. John Horam, Dr. Ian Gibson, Dr. Alan Whitehead, Alan Simpson, Brian White and Mr. David Drew, presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to issue new Building Regulations in relation to the installation of boilers in domestic premises; to make provision for the continuation of the energy efficiency commitment in relation to domestic premises; to require the Secretary of State to consult on extending that provision to non-domestic premises; to require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to consult on reducing value added tax on energy saving materials; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 November, and to be printed. [Bill 153].

Care Homes (Tenancy)

Mr. Paul Burstow presented a Bill to establish the tenancy rights of care home residents; to provide for continuity of care where a care home is closed; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 November, and to be printed. [Bill 154].

Adjournment (Summer)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Vernon Coaker.]*

2.22 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I want to raise two important issues. The first relates to sleep apnoea and road safety.

Last year I helped to organise a working group to examine the problems of sleep disorder and its impact on road accidents. I also tabled an early-day motion, which was signed by 126 Members of Parliament. The motion recognised that a significant proportion of all road accidents resulting in death or serious injury were caused by sleepiness, and that that led to misery. As well as noting the obvious human misery caused by fatal road accidents, however, we should note that a fatal accident costs about £1 million, given the cost of emergency services and the cost of any subsequent inquiry.

I am raising this issue in an attempt to secure more Government recognition of sleep disorders and their impact on society, especially in relation to road accidents. It is currently estimated that sleep disorders affect approximately 770,000 people in the United Kingdom, but despite the number of sufferers there is no mention of sleep disorders in the national health service plan or other Government health guidelines—notwithstanding research showing that treatment is cost-effective, and a recent estimate by sleep experts that untreatable sleep disorders are costing the NHS £432 million a year.

Mary Williams, chief executive of Brake, the road safety charity, issued a statement today saying

"It's a horrific thought that thousands of people setting off on long holiday drives could be unwittingly putting their families at risk because of a sleep disorder. Tragically, people are already dying on our roads because sleep disorders lead drivers to doze off at the wheel. These deaths are preventable and it is high time that"

there was some

"action to educate drivers about sleep disorders and give doctors the resources they need to treat them."

The most common disorder is obstructive sleep apnoea, in which obstruction of the airway during sleep can lead to excessive daytime tiredness. Many sufferers remain undiagnosed because they assume that they are suffering from exhaustion rather than a specific, treatable condition. Dr. Melissa Hack of the Newport Sleep Centre says

"Sleep disorders have a huge impact on the quality of life of the sufferer. Greater attention must be paid to sleep related disorders which can be identified and treated".

This is an important issue, which has been ignored. I have tied it in with road safety becauseof recent research published in a report called "Dead Tired". It concluded that sleep caused 20 per cent. of accidents on our motorways. I urge the Government to take the problem seriously; I will certainly raise it again when we reassemble in the autumn.

I want to say a quick word about Iraq as well. I think that our Government are digging themselves deeper and deeper into the mire. The Untied States has finally been forced to admit what the rest of us already knew: that the war is ongoing, and is costing a fortune. Last night we witnessed an extraordinary scene—American troops in Iraq appearing on television to call for the resignation of Donald Rumsfeld. As for the authority of the British Government, we seem to be shifting from farce to tragedy. As the weapons of mass destruction issue unravels, it looks increasingly likely that the case against Iraq was exaggerated by both the United States and our own Government.

On the matter of uranium from Niger, for example, President Bush and the Prime Minister are not even singing from the same hymn sheet. Let me remind Members of events. At the end of February 2002, former US ambassador Joseph Wilson went to Niger, at the behest of his Government, to investigate claims that uranium was being sold to Iraq. According to his own recently published account, he found that documents purporting to disclose that were forgeries, and the US embassy staff on the ground certainly agreed with him. According to his account, he told the American authorities that several times, but inexplicably his reports seem to have been ignored.

Six months later, in September last year, our Prime Minister presented his first dossier, which contained the claim that Saddam Hussein was attempting to purchase uranium from Niger. This week the Foreign Secretary informed the House that it was not until mid-February this year, a full 12 months later, that British Ministers were apprised of Mr. Wilson's findings. The Foreign Secretary has also assured us in writing—placing a letter in the House of Commons Library—that

"although the CIA told the British government about their reservations concerning this element of the September dossier, UK officials were confident that the dossier's statement was based on reliable intelligence which the government had not shared with the USA."

I have quoted from the Foreign Secretary's letter, because I think it makes the case for me.

Meanwhile, inconveniently—the timing was unfortunate to say the least—the Prime Minister was appearing before the Liaison Committee to assure its members that the dossiers were based on well-founded intelligence. Across the water, the White House was informing the American public that the reference in President Bush's state of the Union speech on 28 January this year had been wrong—a mistake that the CIA has subsequently "coughed up" to. Contrary to that, in a new development this weekend, Condoleezza Rice and Donald Rumsfeld insisted on American television that the President had done nothing wrong: he had simply stated what the British Government had told him. The British Government had told him that Saddam Hussein was attempting to procure uranium from Niger, and therefore his statement was technically correct.

It seems to me that many lives—those of thousands of Iraqi families, as well as the families of dead and injured British and American soldiers—have been shattered on the basis of technicalities such as this. Meanwhile, back at the ranch, President Bush has executed a further about-face. In direct contradiction to what his aides have been saying, he now stands by the "damn good" intelligence that he received.

Finally—and let us hope that it is final—the British Government's assertion that the dossier's claims about Niger uranium were based on other reliable intelligence

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

has now been thrown into question. According to Reuters, a western diplomat close to the International Atomic Energy Agency insists that the intelligence on which the UK says it relied came from the same group of faked documents that Joseph Wilson discredited as long ago as February 2002.

The Government owe Parliament and the British public an urgent answer to the following questions. First, why were the Government not informed about the forged documents until a year after Joseph Wilson's report? After all, we are the Americans' closest allies. Secondly, when did the British intelligence services get wind of those forgeries? Thirdly, what other evidence exists to back up the claim that Iraq was attempting to acquire uranium from Niger, and is the source in question free from the taint of forgery? Fourthly, is it true, as *The Independent* claims today, that the Government are refusing to hand over this evidence to the International Atomic Energy Agency?

By the Foreign Affairs Committee's own admission, it had insufficient access to sources and personnel in order to judge whether the intelligence was faulty or misinterpreted. If the Government accept the right of Parliament to question the evidence of weapons of mass destruction, as the Foreign Secretary did in his statement yesterday, why will the Prime Minister not take the next step and set up an independent judicial inquiry? These are very important matters, which we should look at again soon and urgently.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): May I remind all Members that Mr. Speaker has imposed a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches?

2.31 pm

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): I want to raise an issue that is of importance to my constituents and I and to the House as a whole. In essence, I want to talk about the Prime Minister's forthcoming visit to China and the opportunity that it presents, within the context of the war against terrorism, to give voice to the non-violent aspirations of the long-suffering people of Tibet. I hope that he will take the opportunity in the days ahead to carry with him the hopes of the Tibetans and of their countless friends throughout the world, especially in this House. He will know of the important work done by the all-party group on Tibet under the distinguished chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson). He will also be familiar with early-day motion 834, which raises current causes for deep concern, especially the recent execution of Lobsang Dhondup and the two-year suspended death sentence imposed on the respected Buddhist leader, Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche. In particular, I ask that those on the Government Front Bench convey to the Prime Minister our feeling that he should impress on the Chinese Government the need to make meaningful progress in the current talks between the Tibetans and the Chinese, and to press the Chinese Government to enter into proper negotiations with the Tibetan Government in exile, without stipulating impossible preconditions.

The Prime Minister is going on a world tour—to the USA, Japan, South Korea, China and Hong Kong—and I wish him well; however, I want to concentrate on China. We as a country have great experience in dealing with China over the years, particularly during the years of negotiation on Hong Kong. There is new leadership in China and the United Kingdom wants to be China's European best friend. Business men are going with the Prime Minister, which is good, but we have to deal with China with our eyes wide open.

Tibet has been occupied for 53 years now. The Government are very knowledgeable on United Nations resolutions, a number of which cover Tibet. They deal with the human rights abuses; the transfer of the population on a massive scale; the destruction of whole communities, monasteries and cultural buildings; the degradation of the environment; and the assault on the freedoms of the nomadic way life. International pressure can, and has, made a difference.

The all-party group on Tibet was fortunate to be visited recently by Ngawang Sangdrol, a 23-year old young woman from Tibet whose story illustrates what peaceful protest means there. For demonstrating with a small group of young nuns when she was 13, and for calling for Tibetan independence, she was imprisoned for two years. Because she would not recant and sang songs honouring the Dalai Lama, she was subjected to brutal punishments and stripped of her civil rights. She has been released after 11 years, only though the efforts of Amnesty International and many others, including our colleagues here, particularly the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing). Still deprived of her civil rights, Ngawang Sangdrol was allowed to leave Tibet for medical treatment on the condition that she sign an undertaking not to speak of her treatment. That success is due in large part to the fact that people all over the world hung on to her name. Now, we can see her face to face.

Ngawang Sangdrol is one of hundreds of political detainees—of young people born under the Chinese occupation of Tibet who have steadfastly followed the Dalai Lama's non-violent approach. It would surely be far easier for many of them to follow the more familiar path of the dispossessed and aggrieved of today's world—to meet violence with violence—but they do not. The difference for the Tibetans is the Dalai Lama: a man of enormous authority to his people, and of absolute peace to the world. He is a firm believer in non-violence, and states:

> "We are freedom fighters unique in our peaceful approach to liberation . . . Should this experiment prove successful, it could have a revolutionary effect on future struggles for freedom".

Let me set that in a context that I hope the House can appreciate and will understand. Our country is acutely aware of the threat of terrorism, both internally and internationally. I have supported the Government in their actions in recent months, and I believe that we are right to protect our own interests against organised terrorism. But I also recognise—I know that the Government do, too—that, currently, much in the world situation is feeding the recruitment of terrorists. This, uniquely, is not the situation with the people of Tibet. Where others speak the language of war and practise it, the Dalai Lama speaks only the language of peace and seeks a non-violent resolution of his people's

desperate plight. Is that not what we ask all world leaders to do, and should we not seek to help those few—those very few—who actually do it?

UK Governments past and present have shown the value of innovative non-violent approaches in Northern Ireland. The UK speaks with first-hand experience of terrorism and the path to resolution—so, in our own sphere, we believe that there is another way. It surely follows that we should be prepared to demonstrate this to the world at large, and to say that those who follow peaceful advocacy of their cause can, and should, gain an advantage. Their grievances should be heard, and resolutions should be found to their legitimate concerns; otherwise, we leave them no alternative but violence and terrorism.

A very important moment came in September 2002, with re-establishment of direct contact between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese Government. That was a very brave decision on the part of the Dalai Lama. No political leader since Gandhi has so steadfastly followed the path of non-violence, and none has had their determination to remain non-violent put to such a tough test as the Tibetans, on whom the Chinese have inflicted that test. The Dalai Lama has been abused and vilified by the Chinese authorities as if he were an armed terrorist. Meanwhile, foreign Governments, various world bodies and countless individuals have heaped much praise on the Dalai Lama for his peaceful approach. But however much praise has been given to the Dalai Lama and to the Tibetan people, in practical terms it has been almost meaningless. Tibetans could easily point to numerous examples of violence achieving the desired results.

The Dalai Lama's representatives have paid two visits to Beijing in the past 12 months, but there is no sign yet that the Chinese Government are genuinely willing to work toward real negotiations. Those are still discussions about discussions, and at the moment they appear to be going nowhere. Some believe that the Chinese Government's motive is to string out these talks to curb the Dalai Lama from speaking in public at all. The Chinese have already secured a tight self-restriction on campaigning by the Tibetan world diaspora and Tibet's friends—this in order to demonstrate the Tibetan commitment to dialogue. It is surely in both the international community's and China's interests to show that a non-violent approach warrants a civilised response and practical outcomes.

During his forthcoming visit to China, the Prime Minister can play a significant role in convincing the Chinese that the current talks have to be for real, that they are in their interests and will be to their credit. He speaks with the authority of one who has been personally involved in handling attempts to resolve a terrorist approach to nationalist aspirations. Our Government's policy is to recognise China's special relationship with Tibet on the basis that Tibet enjoys genuine autonomy. This, too, is the policy of the Dalai Lama. The Prime Minster has to underline the fact that the Dalai Lama has made a major concession by not pressing for the independence demanded by many of his people.

As the deputy Leader of the House will know, Chinese diplomacy on such issues is aggressive, and to have any impact at all a similarly robust approach is needed. Indeed, such an approach is also respected, as we know from the example of Hong Kong. For both historical and current reasons, we owe a moral obligation to the Tibetan people and to the Dalai Lama. In the current world context, it is in our interest to give them our support, and to show the Chinese that that is also in their interests.

The opening of dialogue can reflect only creditably on China, but it has to be a genuine dialogue. It must be dialogue that is not made impossible by Chinese pre-conditions, such as demanding that the Dalai Lama should subscribe to statements, knowing that he is in no position to do so.

In summary, I ask the Government to encourage the Prime Minister to urge the Chinese leadership seriously to discuss the issue of Tibet by entering into a proper dialogue with the Dalai Lama or his representatives. This needs to be done against the background of mutual understanding and trust. The Dalai Lama is offering that to the Chinese and they should respond in like manner.

Clearly the Chinese Government are not yet serious, so we should implore the Prime Minister to press China's leaders to understand the opportunity that is presented by the Tibetan leader. This would be in the best interests not only of the Tibetans and the Chinese, but of humanity as a whole. Against the background of the international war against terrorism, there should be a global message that non-violent protest against gross violations of basic human rights deserves our support and should be helped to succeed.

2.40 pm

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale): I wish to raise three issues in the 10 minutes available to me, the first of which is transport. At Transport questions this week, I raised with Ministers the reduction of services at Hartford station in my constituency. I now want to elaborate on the problems that we are experiencing there.

In 1988, British Rail issued a press notice that described Hartford station. It stated:

"Located at the heart of Mid-Cheshire ... ideally situated to provide a fast rail service to various parts of the country and is quickly becoming the recognised centre of convenient rail travel in the Vale Royal area. Since electrification of the West Coast Main Line in 1966, Hartford's role has steadily increased and from May 16th 1988 the service has been vastly improved, with over 20 InterCity trains calling at the station in addition to a further 10 extra holiday trains on Saturdays during the summer. The regular hourly service of local trains throughout the day links Hartford with all stations on the Crewe-Liverpool line."

The notice described how the station served not only Hartford, but Northwich, Winsford, Middlewich, Knutsford and a wider area. It had 100 free car parking spaces, which recently had been extended. The press release explained a number of other services that went through Hartford. In 1988, Hartford was becoming a busy station.

Privatisation stopped all that. In 2001, Virgin Rail ended the west coast main line service that stopped at Hartford. The Virgin Cross Country services that used Hartford were stopped in 2002. Now, the Strategic Rail Authority has confirmed that the Liverpool to Birmingham service will no longer stop at Hartford, although it may well stop at peak periods.

What is most striking about this are the reasons given for the diminution of services at Hartford. A letter from the Strategic Rail Authority stated:

[Mr. Mike Hall]

"It may help if I set out the overall context in which the timetable changes are being made. Since last September the timetable has not worked satisfactorily. This is borne out by our performance statistics, which show that the performance of many operators is still below par. For instance, in the last quarter of last year, punctuality on Virgin Cross County fell by 47.6 per cent. It was clear that, in the interests of passengers, a new approach was needed."

The letter then mitigates the position, saying:

"The section of the West Coast Main Line between Crewe and Weaver Junction is double-track only, which creates a 'pinch point' with a lot of pressure on available capacity. For this reason a number of Hartford stops will be removed".

I find it hard to bring together what British Rail was able to do in 1988 with what the SRA is telling us now. I want more trains to stop at Hartford station to encourage people to leave their cars at home and use public transport.

Virgin Rail says that it has finished the Hartford stops, but that passengers can get a free train from Hartford to Crewe and then the intercity line from Crewe to London. However, the first train to leave Hartford will not get business men or women to Crewe in time to catch a train to be in London for 9 o'clock. They have a choice; they can either drive their cars to Manchester airport and fly or get on the M6 and drive. I am looking to Ministers and the Department for Transport to see what they can do to improve the services that use this excellent station in my constituency, and I look forward to that happening.

On a related issue, Cheshire county council has decided, in its wisdom, to cut £250,000 from school bus services. Three services serve my constituency, all of which are threatened. The Weaver to Helsby service takes a large number of pupils on a tortuous journey through my constituency to an excellent school. If that service is removed, the parents of those children will have a choice: they can take the children in the car or they can put them in a taxi, as it is far too far to walk. That is an ill-thought-out proposal.

The proposal to remove the services to Aston primary school in the north of my constituency is equally poor. The school is rural and the narrow roads that service it are not fit for children to walk along. Cheshire county council says that it wants children to get in their parents' cars to go to school, or to make a dangerous journey. That is not acceptable.

The third transport issue that I want to raise relates to the Competition Act 1998. Two bus companies serve the northern part of my constituency, Arriva and First North Western. On one route, from Helsby to Chester, one could until recently interchange tickets on that route. The inter-availability of tickets has been removed because of the transport companies' fear that they will fall foul of the Competition Act, because both companies charge the same price for the journey. That scheme has been in existence for about 16 years, from when the route was split between the two.

The scheme does not threaten competition but it serves my community well and has done so for many years. Because of the threat that the companies may be acting in contravention of the Competition Act, they have had to remove the inter-availability of tickets. I want common sense on the issue, rather than the red tape that is bringing about another diminution of transport services in my constituency.

The second issue concerns Cloughwood, a residential special school for boys with emotional and behavioural difficulties. I have been associated with the school for about 15 years. When I worked in special education, I visited the school, and I have kept a close association with it since becoming a Member of Parliament. It is the premier residential EBD school in the country. Its last Ofsted report said that it was an excellent school; Ofsted could find nothing to criticise in the school.

For boys aged from about eight to 11 who have failed everywhere else in the education system, the school provides a real opportunity to succeed. They do well in GCSE examinations; the school's league table position is there for all to see. The school is represented nationally in trampolining competitions, and the art work in the school is fantastic; the school has a charter mark for art. It is a first-class school, but it is under threat because Cheshire county council, short-sightedly, wants to save some money.

Since September last year, the council has reduced the number of admissions to the school and now says that there are surplus places. It wants to change the residential nature of the school into a mixed residential and day-care school. Anybody who has worked in special education will know that that mix does not work. The only way that one can succeed with boys presenting such problems at 10 or 11 is to have them 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It has to be done that way and I am appalled that Cheshire county council has made the decision without properly consulting. I want to give notice that I shall oppose the move by the county council as vigorously as I can.

The third local issue concerns Halton hospital in my constituency. On 1 July this year, the clinical director at North Cheshire Hospitals Trust unilaterally, without consultation and without following due process, decided to close two intensive care beds in the hospital. He did so on the pretext that he did not have enough anaesthetic cover for the two hospital sites. Nothing has changed, as far as I can see, in the last two months.

Now, anybody in Halton hospital who needs intensive care must be moved through Widnes to Whiston, or through the southern part of Runcorn to Warrington general hospital. That is a diminution of service at Halton general hospital to which I am totally and utterly opposed. Efforts to get the clinical director to change his mind have so far not succeeded. However, I shall be looking to the North Cheshire Hospitals Trust and the Cheshire and Merseyside strategic health authority to come forward with a plan that will reinstate those intensive care beds to a hospital that serves my constituency well.

I am grateful for the House's attention to these matters.

2.49 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): As the House knows, two issues are so important to my constituency that I have promised my constituents that I will raise them at every practical opportunity on the Floor of the House. Hon. Members will not be surprised to hear that they are

the future of the royal hospital Haslar, and the risk that 400 young men may be accommodated on the Daedalus site in the inner Solent.

The background to the Haslar hospital problem is that the Government decided in 1997–98 to investigate the clear deficiencies, particularly in respect of senior consultants, in the Defence Medical Services. Those deficiencies were well known for some time, and a committee comprising no medically trained staff decided that the way ahead was to build a new centre of medical excellence—along the lines, they hoped, of Guy's hospital in London or the John Radcliffe hospital in Oxford—and to close the only remaining military hospital in the United Kingdom, the royal hospital Haslar in my constituency.

When they pressed ahead with the plan, they found that, apart from Birmingham, there were no takers for the new centre of medical excellence. I have to say that it is with some considerable reluctance that medical staff are now being moved to Birmingham as the plan proceeds. I have met all the senior people involved and I know that they are capable. They are not medical but military people; if they had been tasked to take Basra, no doubt they would have taken it. However, they were tasked to close Haslar hospital and to move defence medicine to Birmingham: they are getting on with it efficiently.

The question for the future is what will happen to defence medicine and to the royal hospital Haslar? Defence medicine is not thriving at the moment in the key faculties of general medicine, general surgery and orthopaedic surgery and there are dramatic shortages of anaesthetists. There are only 23 anaesthetists out of an establishment of 120, and only 18 general surgeons out of an establishment of 44. Clearly, things are not going well in the field of defence medicine.

Of course we must all wish the Ministry of Defence well and hope that it is successful in its innovative plans to increase pay and retention payments in an attempt to ensure that doctors who join the Army, Navy and Air Force actually remain there. The problem is not recruitment—people are willing to enter the armed forces and be paid for their training—but retention. It often seems more attractive for doctors to move outside the services once they have received the qualifications that they want. We wish the Ministry of Defence well in the task of retaining doctors, nurses and other staff. I for one am convinced that, if Haslar hospital were retained as the centre of esprit de corps of the Defence Medical Services, it would have a significant effect on retaining medical staff.

I move on to the civilian side, because the Haslar hospital has served the civilian population, as well as the Army, Navy and Air Force, for many years. It is an integral and necessary part of the medical establishment in the area. I received an assurance from the then Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears) in a letter of 28 January 2003. She said:

"As you may know the Health Authority undertook a local consultation from January to April 2000. Following this consultation a commitment was made to the people of Gosport to develop a substantial facility as RH Haslar (subject to Ministry of Defence agreement on the use of the site), with day case surgery, diagnostic services, outpatient clinics and the Haslar Accident Treatment Centre. The local NHS remains committed to this vision, and we are working closely with the Ministry of Defence to take it forward."

The problem is the proviso,

"subject to Ministry of Defence agreement on the use of the site".

Currently, there has been no arrangement between the Ministry of Defence and the NHS on the use of the site, and without that agreement the Ministry of Defence remains locked into owning a hospital that it does not want to run, and the NHS has superb facilities available to it, but cannot come to a final conclusion.

As we sit here today, a private finance initiative bid is being considered for the other local hospital, the Queen Alexandra hospital, Corsham. Once the hospital trust sorts that out, it will be able look into the longer-term position. I maintain that, with the superb diagnostic imaging treatments available at Haslar, the MRI scanners and the ultrasound facilities, which are built into the structure of the building and are incapable of being moved elsewhere—quite apart from the 280 beds and other facilities—the NHS will not be able to cope without Haslar's facilities. I maintain that the Minister should follow through her commitment of 29 January 2003 and confirm that arrangements are being put in hand to transfer Haslar hospital from the ownership of the Ministry of Defence to the NHS, and then the NHS hospital trust could plan ahead. That having been done, I am confident that the Ministry of Defence, recognising that the Haslar facilities remained and would not be closed as currently projected in 2007, could examine its own plans further and continue to use the royal hospital, Haslar as a centre for medical excellence and esprit de corps in the Defence Medical Services. That is my plea today.

The second issue is the Daedalus site in Lee-on-the-Solent. It came as a bombshell in February this year when the Home Office announced that it was considering, initially, 550 families, and subsequently 400 young men, to be located at the Daedalus site, a former naval air station at Lee-on-the-Solent. The area of west Lee-on-the-Solent has been in shock ever since. A local estate agent told me that he has not sold a single house there since the announcement was made. Yet when I tabled a parliamentary question asking the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration what consultations she had undertaken with local estate agents before stating that the identification of the site of the accommodation centre would not have an effect on house prices or sales—her assurance was that she had no reason to believe that it would have such an effect—the answer was, of course, none.

The truth is that it has affected local house prices and the transferability of houses. I feel particularly sorry for a constituent who e-mailed me yesterday saying that he was under threat of redundancy and might need to sell his house, but could not afford to do so at a reduced price. Clearly, other areas where accommodation centres are under consideration—namely, Bicester and Newton—will affect decisions about the Daedalus site. The decision on Bicester, which was expected two or three weeks ago, has been delayed until the autumn. I believe that the delay may be due to the inspector's reservations about placing an accommodation centre in a quiet rural location next to a small village. It seems that the decision on Daedalus will await the Bicester decision. I regard waiting as good news because we

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

know that the Government are considering the screening of applicants for political asylum outside the UK as urged by the Conservative party. If the Government are capable of pursuing that proposal, it will put off completely the need to have accommodation centres.

I end by saying that siting an accommodation centre in Lee-on-the-Solent and placing 400 young men in a quiet seaside retirement area is viewed locally with horror. Local residents are worried about security because there are many military establishments in the area. They are concerned about pressure on resources. They know that young men from Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and the former Republic of Yugoslavia would not integrate locally. They are vehemently opposed to the plan. I hope that the Home Office will take my plea into account before taking a decision on Daedalus.

2.58 pm

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): I am grateful once again to have the opportunity to participate in an end-of-Session Adjournment debate. These debates really do provide Members with an opportunity to comment on a wide range of issues right across the political spectrum.

The first issue that I wish to comment on today is the war in Iraq and its aftermath. I was not fortunate enough to catch Mr. Speaker's eye on the occasions when this matter was debated in the House, especially before the conflict, and I would therefore like to take this opportunity to put my position on the public record.

I abhor the use of violence in all its forms. It runs contrary to my moral, intellectual and religious beliefs, and I find the appalling carnage, death and destruction that occur during a war almost too horrific to contemplate. Yet, despite having those deeply held views, I am also pragmatic enough to know that, in the dangerous world in which we live, there are occasions on which the use of military force is both necessary and justified. I had to be totally convinced that the use of military force was essential and that it complied with the requirements of international law before I supported military action against Iraq earlier this year. Throughout the pre-war period I was greatly encouraged by the Government's attempts to secure the peaceful disarmament of Iraq, under the auspices of the UN Security Council. The Government's role in persuading the US to follow the UN route, and in securing UN resolution 1441, was commendable.

The policy of backing up resolution 1441 with a credible threat of military action if Iraq did not fully comply with its terms offered the best chance for the peaceful disarmament of Iraq then. However, as we are all aware, the French declaration of an intention to veto any resolution that specifically allowed the use of military action effectively scuppered that course of action. In my view, that collapse of the diplomatic process made war inevitable. The only question that remained to be answered was whether Britain should commit its armed forces to the conflict.

I was convinced that Iraq did possess chemical and biological weapons and had to be disarmed. I was also convinced that weapons inspectors would not be able to achieve anything meaningful without the full and active co-operation of the Iraqi regime. I was further convinced that the Iraqi regime had no intention of giving that co-operation. Additionally, I believed that Saddam Hussein would not hesitate to use his weapons, or to supply them to terrorist organisations for use, against his perceived enemies. He and his regime had a proven track record of crimes against humanity. We have all now seen the mass graves. Of course, I could have been wrong then, but I was not prepared to take that chance and therefore I supported the Government's decision to commit our forces to the conflict in Iraq.

The fact that as yet no weapons of mass destruction have been found does not lead me to conclude that the intelligence provided to the British and American Governments was seriously flawed. If we consider the situation in Northern Ireland and the issue of disarming the paramilitaries, we see that small organisations have been able to conceal arms and explosives in a relatively small area, and the combined efforts of the military, the intelligence agencies and the police force have been unable to detect them for more than 30 years. So it is hardly surprising that in a country the size of Iraq the former Iraqi regime has been able to hide its weapons. In my view, that merely demonstrates the futility of endlessly continuing with the UN weapons inspections. Throughout the Iraq crisis, the Prime Minister has displayed great fortitude, leadership and statesmanship and I commend him for that. The same cannot be said for the Leader of the Opposition.

I shall now touch briefly on a couple of other issues. Although they are completely unrelated, they do have a common thread in that there are heated arguments in political circles about whether or not they should be the subject of referendums.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): The hon. Lady has been uncharacteristically curt and ungracious about my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. Many hon. Members will share her admiration for the Prime Minister's statesmanship, but will also be prepared to put on record their admiration for the fact that the Leader of the Opposition, from the start of the war to its finish, was wholehearted in his support for the Government and the British national interest.

Geraldine Smith: The Leader of the Opposition did fully support the Government during the conflict in Iraq. He called for us to take action and was behind the action that was taken, but now he seems to have changed his mind. He is taking an opportunistic view of a serious matter that should be above party politics.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Geraldine Smith: No, I am sorry, but I am limited to 10 minutes. I have moved on to the forthcoming European constitution—which may prompt more interventions—and to the proposals for English regional government and, in particular, a referendum for the north-west. I shall make it clear at the outset that I am not in favour of a referendum for either proposal.

Taking the European constitution first, it appears to me to be premature, if not slightly absurd, to call for a referendum on a matter that is still very much subject to

negotiation, the final outcome of which may have no significant constitutional impact on our citizens. Referendums should be held only when the electorate are in the best possible position to make a judgment. They should be held only when people know exactly what they are getting. I would therefore urge the Prime Minister to continue to resist the ill founded and opportunistic calls from the anti-European element, in the House and elsewhere, for an open-ended commitment to a referendum, regardless of the outcome of the negotiations on the European constitution.

On the question of regional government, it would perhaps be more appropriate to refer to it as local government reorganisation, because it appears to have far more to do with the latter than the former. In this instance, I am opposed to a referendum being held, because we have more important matters to address, such as health, education, crime and antisocial behaviour. I am also opposed to what is being proposed and fully intend to campaign actively for a no vote when a referendum is held in the north-west region.

To proceed with referendums on the basis of a favourable outcome on the minuscule return of a consultation process involving a tiny fraction of the electorate is both absurd and wrong. The decision looks even more bizarre when we remember that neither the few who were consulted, nor the even fewer who bothered to respond, had any detailed knowledge of the make-up of the forms of government that would be put to them in a referendum.

It is clear that while the subject may excite many politicians, the general public appear to be indifferent to the whole idea. Equally, the business community is far from convinced of the benefits of regional government and is concerned about the adverse impact that it could have. I see little in the proposals for regional government that would kindle a spark of enthusiasm in the public or alleviate the concerns of the business community.

Local democracy will be diminished rather than enhanced by the abolition of the county council structure and its replacement by a remote regional assembly. The cost of implementing the changes to local government structures will be enormous and the brunt of the cost—if not all of it—will be borne by local businesses and taxpayers. The Government will no doubt absolve themselves of any responsibility for the cost, on the grounds that it was local people who voted for the changes. While it may be argued that in the longer term the new structures will produce savings through economies of scale, such savings invariably fail to materialise in real life.

What the regions of this country require now is additional resources for regional development, not additional regional government. If political change is required to achieve that, those changes should be made here at Westminster where the power and resources lie. The parliamentary programme should be changed to allow regular specific regional debates and, indeed, regional Question Times. The Government should appoint Ministers with responsibility for the development of a designated region, who can be held to account by the Members of Parliament for that region. That is the direction that we should take towards establishing a stronger, more effective role for the regions.

I could have mentioned many other issues—the shortage of NHS dentists in my constituency, the need for still more police on the beat and community support officers, and the problems of rogue landlords in seaside towns—but I am aware that many Members wish to speak. I will say no more other than to wish you, Madam Deputy Speaker, a very happy recess and to urge all Members to—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady's time is up.

3.10 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): We heard a refreshing and honest speech from the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith), and a characteristically distinguished speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), who has consistently represented the interests of his constituents vis-à-vis the future of the defence hospital at Haslar. I recently visited the site with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and I very much hope that it can stay in medical use and that it will be used by the civil population and the military. It is tragic that an institution of such distinction and historic excellence should be put at risk. I trust that wiser counsels will prevail.

I also trust that wiser counsels will prevail in respect of the future of the cancer centre and the burns and plastics unit at Mount Vernon hospital in my constituency. For many years, since the advent in power of this Administration in 1997, I have had cause to come to the House to make speeches about the future of Mount Vernon hospital at Northwood and of Harefield hospital in my constituency. Both are regional specialist hospitals.

The Northwood cancer centre is not just a centre of clinical excellence, but the Gray Cancer Institute, the Lynda Jackson Macmillan centre for cancer care and the Michael Sobell hospice for palliative care for cancer patients are all on the site. It is an integrated facility that is second to none in our part of the country. Furthermore, it takes patients not merely from north-west London but from Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and beyond, as does Harefield hospital. Harefield is a cardio-thoracic centre that has done more heart transplants than any hospital in the world. Yet Her Majesty's Government are prepared to see both institutions so greatly reduced that they will have no significant standing in the future and their services will be transferred elsewhere regardless of the strong desire of patients, staff and local people that they should stay in their present locations, which are ideal.

I will talk about Mount Vernon and, under the parliamentary procedure of the old days, I would have had cause to do so at this very moment. The official consultation on its future is paradoxically being carried out by the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire strategic health authority and it will conclude on 1 September before the House returns after the recess. It is urgent that the arguments to keep the cancer centre where it is be advanced once again.

There has been huge investment over the years, and not just from the national health service. Many generous subscribers and charities have also invested there. I refer to the Gray Cancer Institute, which is funded almost

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

entirely from private donations, as is the Restoration of Appearance and Function Trust, RAFT, which does marvellous pioneering work in the disciplines of burns and plastic surgery. Their work is recognised the world over.

It is extraordinary that institutions of such excellence should be run down in favour of-mega-hospitals that cost hundreds of millions of pounds and that are based in locations that are less than ideal. They are not ideal for my constituents or those who live in the catchment area currently served by Mount Vernon and by Harefield. Harefield is in a quiet rural village in green belt, but its services are to be transferred to Paddington. If one goes out of the hospital gates at Paddington for one's recuperation, there is a strong likelihood that one will be mugged. That is not the best way to recover.

Let us consider the alternatives to the Mount Vernon cancer centre. One is in Hatfield on a greenfield site that has not even been identified. The other is at Hemel Hempstead, and I see the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) in his place. From my constituents' point of view, it is very remote and hard to reach.

When we had a meeting in the House about the proper place for the cancer centre, the unanimous verdict of those Members present was, with, I think, one exception, that it should be where it is now at Mount Vernon. That was the view of the eminent professors from the Gray laboratory, the clinicians who work at Mount Vernon and tens of thousands of my constituents and others who have signed petitions in favour of Mount Vernon. However, because there is the extraordinary outlook that Whitehall and the NHS know best and that the planners should carry more clout than those who use or work in the service, we are facing a move away, with disastrous consequences for my constituency and an adverse effect on those who have enjoyed the quality of service at Mount Vernon and Harefield. I have never received a complaint about the quality of cancer care at Mount Vernon, so I do not comprehend why the service it provides that should be put at risk.

We carried out an independent study about the relative costs of Harefield and Paddington. The net cost of the transfer of the cardio-thoracic services from Harefield to Paddington was about £135 million as against a cost of £20 million for the cost of modernisation of the existing facilities. The position at Mount Vernon is even more complicated because of the scanners and radiological facilities there.

At long last, the North West London strategic health authority has come into the equation and it has persuaded the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire strategic health authority that the views of north-west Londoners should at least be taken into account. A parallel consultation is going on about the North West London strategic health authority's proposals. However, its proposals are predicated on the recommendations already made by Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. Therefore, all that North West London will say is that some residual cancer services should be retained at Mount Vernon. It has in mind an ambulatory service whereby outpatients can have radiotherapy and chemotherapy at Mount Vernon. It has been argued that, because no significant surgical facilities are left on the Mount Vernon site, thanks to the previous depredations of the NHS planners who have moved services to Hillingdon hospital and elsewhere, it is unsafe to maintain cancer treatment in depth at Mount Vernon. In view of the total infrastructure of cancer support and research at Mount Vernon, my argument is that it is infinitely cheaper to bring in additional surgeons as required.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend is making an extremely revealing speech. Does he think that such perverse thinking on the part of the central planners might explain why the massive increase in expenditure on the NHS has not been matched by a commensurate increase in clinical activity?

Mr. Wilkinson: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right, but I see rays of hope. A new facility called the Anzac centre at Harefield has been opened. At last, more NHS investment is going in. At Mount Vernon, scanners are being modernised and extra facilities provided. An interim development is in process and, at long last, this is at the very least giving the NHS the option of going for a more cost-effective solution by building up the existing facilities. That is what my constituents and the patients who are treated at Mount Vernon would wish. It is important for plastic surgery and cancer treatment to be available on the same site so that we may have the totality of cancer care that Mount Vernon hospital provides. That is the desire of my constituents and in the weeks before the consultations conclude, I hope that such arguments will carry the day—they deserve to.

3.20 pm

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): I am delighted to be able to participate in the debate. I, like my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith), wish to put several points on the record.

I shall go straight to the Iraq war. Many of my constituents cannot understand why I have not spoken in any of the debates on the subject, so I now take my chance to do so. When I voted against the Government last March, I did so with a heavy heart. I am not one of the usual suspects, as they are called, but I have always been a party loyalist. I believe in collective responsibility, so I take some of the blame or credit for what has happened, depending on one's point of view.

The amendment that was moved during the debate in March echoed my own reservations about the war. It did not say that Saddam Hussein was not an evil tyrant or that he should not be overthrown. In my opinion, it was not the right time to go to war. The inspectors had found little evidence of weapons of mass destruction, and although I have no doubt that Saddam Hussein's regime had the capability to make and deploy such weapons, I thought that the process was at too early a stage to start a war.

I also thought that the war was being hurried because of external factors. I believe that the fact that the US presidential elections are to be held next year had a great deal to do with the timing. The proof of the Government's position still needs to be shown, but I am

willing to wait, because finding the weapons could take some time. After all, our servicemen have been in Northern Ireland for many years and we have hardly found a weapon. Why should we think that it would be easier in a country the size of Iraq?

I supported the Government in the second vote on the Iraq debate because the motion contained a specific reference to United Nations involvement, about which I feel strongly. I was in Iraq between 10 and 12 June this year as part of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, and our people on the ground were disappointed by the UN. Distribution of water by the UN in the Basra area has been poor and irregular, and the armed forces believe that aid would be distributed regularly if they were in charge of it. That has not happened under the UN and, as a result, local people blame the armed forces for poor water and food supplies although it is the fault of the UN. I take my hat off to the armed forces because they are doing an excellent job in conditions that hon. Members would not believe.

We should now draw a line in the sand and look to the future. It does the people of Iraq no good when all we hear is politicians arguing over history and how it will be written. What those people want is their country back and to be fed and happy. They want a future to look forward to.

My next point is important to my constituents in Glasgow, Anniesland. There are 13,500 pensioner households in my constituency and about 18,000 over-60s—it has one of the highest concentrations of elderly people in Europe. I am always keen to ensure that the Government implement measures to increase financial assistance and support for our pensioners.

I recently met pensioners in my constituency specifically to discuss the new pension credit, which will be introduced in October. The credit is an excellent idea—anything that puts more money in pensioners' pockets is more than welcome. The overwhelming message that I am receiving is that pensioners welcome the credit but that there are worries about its implementation. Some letters that pensioners have received are complicated and should be simplified. We have yet to find out how the help systems will alleviate such problems, and I want an assurance from the Government that we will not have the same debacle that occurred with the new tax credits and that the system will be ironed out before October.

I wish to mention shipbuilding, which I have spoken about many times in the Chamber and Westminster Hall. Any Glasgow Member with a constituency that borders the Clyde knows that BAE Systems is important to the area because it employs more than 2,000 people. However, I was dismayed to read in this week's newspapers about an argument that is creeping up about how much the new carriers will cost. The situation is another example of BAE Systems misusing its power on Ministry of Defence matters. I hope that the Government will sort out the situation. It is a bit worrying that the price of an aircraft carrier can practically double overnight. I hope that the Government will ensure that the company adheres to the agreements that it made when it signed the contracts.

I chair the all-party group on telecommunications. I sighed with relief on Monday when we finished our consideration of the Lords amendments to the Communications Bill, which has now received Royal Assent. Over the past 18 months, we have addressed such issues as competition in the industry, regulation, the development and availability of new technology, conditions in the industry and consumer protection. I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests.

I want to raise a couple of issues that were neglected during our consideration of the Communications Bill. When an industry such as the communications industry is buoyant, the problem is that highly trained people are headhunted by more profitable companies that place little value on training. The EU high level taskforce on skills and mobility reported that 80 per cent. of today's skills will become obsolete in 10 years. Employees who were once highly skilled do not undergo sufficient training in the industry at present. It was unfortunate that during our consideration of the Bill, we could not reach the same agreement on training for communication workers as we could for broadcast workers, who were covered by the Bill. I hope that the White Paper on skills will lead to a consideration of that. The White Paper's foreword says:

> "The skills of our people are a vital national asset. Skills help businesses achieve the productivity, innovation and profitability needed to compete. They help individuals raise their employability, and achieve their ambitions for themselves, their families and communities."

I hope that those matters will be considered for communication workers.

I hope that Ofcom will do a better job than Oftel. I raised that with the then Leader of the House, when I asked:

> "Is my right hon. Friend aware of the restrictive practices that are being applied by NTL and Telewest in relation to the new directory enquiries system? They are not permitting any of their 5 million customers to contact the other"

82 companies with "118" numbers

> "that are allowed to provide services and have paid a lot of money to obtain their numbers"

when the ballot was held on the new numbering scheme. I went on to ask:

> "Will my right hon. Friend try to arrange a debate, or get in touch with the Department of Trade and Industry and in particular Oftel, which has refused to do anything on the grounds that 5 million people are too small a number to be bothered with? Perhaps one of the Opposition parties would consider requesting a debate next week."

The Leader of the House replied:

> "I was not aware of that, and I thank my hon. Friend for telling me about it. If what he says is accurate, it is extremely disturbing, and at the very least it is something that I should bring to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I will do that."—[*Official Report*, 5 June 2003; Vol. 405, c. 327.]

I am still waiting for a reply.

I have received communications from both companies, but neither is prepared to allow free unlimited access to other "118" numbers, and will do so only if a financial agreement is arranged. That is deplorable. The 5 million customers, some of whom are in my constituency, receive an inferior service. At best, they could pay through the nose. I hope that Ofcom will look after consumers better than Oftel. I, for one, will not be sad to see it go.

Dr. Murrison: Does the hon. Gentleman share my regret that many telecommunication companies are not registered with the telecommunications ombudsman's excellent scheme? Will he join me in congratulating Virgin Mobile in Trowbridge on recently joining that scheme?

John Robertson: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on plugging his constituents.

When the "118" numbers for directory enquiries were auctioned off, no one was aware that 5 million people would not get access to them. The companies did not realise that they would have to make a deal with companies like Telewest or NTL for the numbers to be accessed. Five million is not a small number. After all, it is probably more people than voted Liberal.

3.31 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I will not respond to that last remark by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson).

I am delighted to contribute to the debate. A number of us contribute regularly to these debates. Unlike so many other occasions in the Chamber, I am impressed by the sincerity of the contributions by hon. Members on both sides of the House; there is little artificiality.

I want to pick out three contributions by hon. Members who referred to the Iraq war. Although the contributions were different, they were all sincere. I hope hon. Members accept that my colleagues and I acknowledge the sincerity of others on the subject. I hope that that will be reciprocated. I do not think that people have been opportunistic—the issue is very important. It is, perhaps, the biggest that most of us will face in our political lifetimes. Hon. Members have genuinely felt it necessary to take a particular approach in difficult circumstances. I do not think that it is so much a case of deliberately deluding other people as a case of self-delusion. It is important for us to remember that.

I was struck by what the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) said. She reflected the important deep-seated concerns of many of our fellow citizens. That is summed up appositely by a former head of the Joint Intelligence Committee, Mr. Rodric Braithwaite, who said in the *Financial Times* on 10 July:

"Fishmongers sell fish: warmongers sell wars."

It is all too easy for those who have adopted an attitude to find good reasons to support it. That is not necessarily an exaggeration. Inevitably, if one has taken up a position, one tends to emphasise the things that support it rather than the things that oppose it. I recognised the sincerity of all three hon. Members who talked about Iraq.

The hon. Member for Halifax also referred to sleep-related driving accidents, which is another important issue. I have worked with her and the excellent pressure group, Brake. It is a sad fact that 20 per cent. of accidents on motorways are due to sleep-related tendencies. That is serious.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Tibet—[HON. MEMBERS: "Tibet?"] I mean the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend), who spoke eloquently on behalf of the people of Tibet. He was right. It would be a great mistake for the Prime Minister not to take the opportunity to represent the views of the forgotten people of Tibet when he meets the Chinese leadership. We all hope that the UK Government will continue to give robust and consistent support for the Dalai Lama, who has been put in a difficult position by recent developments.

The hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall) drew an interesting parallel between the issues that related to his constituency, all of which seemed to be about consultation. It is a feature of discussion on occasions like this that we are all concerned about the extent to which quite complicated proposals are put before us and before our constituents, but often in a way that either makes a fait accompli seem to be inevitable or, perhaps in some circumstances, makes it impossible for us to make a reasonable and intelligent contribution to an ongoing decision-making process.

That is true for the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers). I have followed him on four or five occasions in this sort of debate. On one occasion he was not in the Chamber when I had prepared my comments about what he would say, in anticipation. Although his efforts on behalf of the royal hospital have not been fully successful, the very fact that he has been persistent in seeking to draw the attention of all authorities at all levels to that centre of excellence has had an impact. However, there will now be a period of indecision. That is one of the problems of trying to hold back an unwelcome decision. I accept what the hon. Gentleman says about the special expertise that the defence medical team has had at the royal hospital, and moving it to Birmingham will inevitably be dislocating in the literal sense. I recognise that that is a real problem, but it is one that we all face.

Every time we challenge an apparent decision that is put before us, we shall inevitably increase the period of indecision. That is a price that we have to pay, but one that as local representatives we are only too willing to pay in most circumstances, if it results in a better decision in the longer term.

The hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) talked about referenda. I hate the word referendums; it does not sound right. I thought that the hon. Lady was rather pushing her luck when she said that she was against a referendum on regional devolution but she would argue vociferously against the proposal that would be put forward. That sounds like not having one's cake and not eating it. That is an extraordinary attitude. If there is not to be a referendum, the hon. Lady would not have the opportunity to advance her argument.

Geraldine Smith: I said that I was against a referendum in the north-west at this moment because there are more important issues to deal with such as health, education, crime and antisocial behaviour, and because there was no support for a referendum.

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Lady also said that she would argue strongly against it. If she did not have a referendum, she would not have that opportunity. She said that she was against all referenda, before she came to that section of her speech. I made a careful note. She said that she was against referenda. She also said that she was against a referendum on the European Union

constitution because it would be premature. That is perfectly reasonable, but there may come an opportunity and a moment when we have to have recourse to the British people, to give them an opportunity to express themselves. I believe that that is highly likely, and so do my colleagues. For the hon. Lady to say in advance that we do not know what is in it and therefore we should not have a referendum is just as absurd as saying, "We don't know what is in it, therefore we should have a referendum." Clearly we should wait to see what the question is, and then decide how best to put it to the British people.

The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson)—this is a subject that I have heard him speak about before—

Mr. Bercow It is pronounced Ryeslip.

Mr. Tyler: I come from the far Celtic west and I confess that I do not know where these places are.

The issue was, of course, consultation. I accept very much what the hon. Gentleman said. I know a little about Harefield because some of my constituents have benefited from the extraordinary professionalism and skills at Harefield hospital. I am not so well aware of Mount Vernon hospital. However, that would seem to be another example where consultation is at the key of what will happen. Of course, in such a case, it is a matter of consultation not only within the hon. Gentleman's constituency and the immediate area around it; so many people, including some of my constituents, have benefited from the high quality of service at these hospitals.

In a sense, this is a half-term report. Unfortunately, I do not have an opportunity at the end of the debate to speak on behalf of my colleagues. However, I respect what the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland said about the debate on 18 March. It was a seminal moment for the House. There was not a free vote exactly, but it became a real debate. The hon. Gentleman listened carefully to the arguments and he took a view. I respect his sincerity. His view happened to be the same as mine. I equally respect the sincerity of those who took a different view, having listened to the debate.

On that occasion—I give credit to the Government in this respect—we clipped the wings of the royal prerogative. I doubt whether any future Prime Minister could possibly go to war—could send troops from this country to any major hostilities—without coming to the House for a definitive debate and a definitive vote. That is an important step forward for all of us who believe that parliamentary democracy should be strengthened.

I should like to put in my two-penn'orth now, and deal with my own hobby horse. I would like to tell the House a cautionary tale. Last Wednesday, I tabled a question to the Prime Minister. It happened to be the day on which, by firm convention, the Government should have given the House its response to proposals by the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform. They had two months to respond, but did not do so. As I said in business questions, they gave their response yesterday, and it was published at midnight.

I therefore asked the Prime Minister

"how he intends to fulfil the undertaking to make the House of Lords more representative and democratic."

In his response, the Prime Minister did not shuffle the matter sideways, as has often been the case in the past, but said:

"I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell) on 7 July".—[*Official Report*, 9 July 2003; Vol. 408, c. 853W.]

I therefore looked at the question tabled by the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell), who asked the Prime Minister

"what plans he has to ensure that political opinion in Northern Ireland is proportionately represented in the House of Lords."

The answer was:

"I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) on 15 January".—[*Official Report*, 7 July 2003; Vol. 408, c. 617–18W.]

I went back again and found that on that occasion the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay)—I am sorry that he is not here—asked the Prime Minister

"if it is his policy that the political balance of the House of Lords should be maintained prior to the implementation of legislation completing the second stage of reform."

The Prime Minister replied:

"While the way forward on reform of the House of Lords is still under consideration, arrangements for identifying new members of the House remain unchanged. Membership of the House is kept under ongoing review."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2003; Vol. 397, c. 632.]

I should like to make two points to the House. First, those are three very different questions. Even if the first answer was right, it is clearly not right for the other two questions. Secondly, and much more importantly, since that first question and answer, we have had a major debate in both Houses and a major Division in the Commons, substantially rejecting the option of a fully appointed upper Chamber, which was promoted by the Prime Minister in concert with the then Lord Chancellor. There were 78 votes against that option—the biggest majority of the evening. Moreover, the Joint Committee has undertaken a careful analysis of the position and reported to the House. The Prime Minister, however, ignored that, because he referred me to an answer that preceded all those events.

I am not someone who thinks that the Prime Minister treats the House of Commons as a doormat, although I know that some Members think so. However, that is heavy and substantial evidence of the Prime Minister's level of respect not just for what is said in the House, but for its votes. The House voted firmly and securely against a fully appointed House of Lords and, as the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said immediately after my contribution to business questions this afternoon, the House clearly does not want a House full of Tony's cronies—we do not want a fully appointed upper House. However, the paper published by the Lord Chancellor today talks about a House that in the medium term, and not just the short term, would get rid of the remaining 92 hereditary peers and appoint all its Members. With that proposal for a fully appointed House of Lords, he is telling the House of Commons, "I do not care what you think".

[Mr. Tyler]

The attitude of some hon. Members to House of Lords reform, and especially its electoral aspects, has been conditioned by the concern that the Commons should remain pre-eminent. We have all heard that argument, but what does it say about the Government's respect for that view if, when the Commons votes against a fully appointed upper Chamber, they say, "To hell with you, we do not care what you think"? It is a ridiculous situation, and as soon as we return from the recess we must take the issue very seriously indeed.

Mr. Bercow: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. Given that democratic legitimacy and parliamentary scrutiny alike dictate that the Government should now proceed to fulfil their manifesto commitment on an elected second Chamber, does he not share my concern that the present Leader of the House of Commons does not seem to be as willing to flex his muscles on this subject as, to his great and enduring credit, was the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook)?

Mr. Tyler: All I can say is: let us wait and see. I hope we may find that the Leader of the House is prepared to stand up for what the House has said and clearly determined in its votes. Let us wait and see—there will be opportunities. As the right hon. Gentleman told the House earlier this afternoon, he voted for a 100 per cent. elected House, an 80 per cent. elected House and a 60 per cent. elected House.

I draw to the attention of colleagues again the fact that 332 hon. Members voted for one or other of those options. From the Lord Chancellor's paper, one would think that he had not read our debate. Pretending that there was no consensus for a substantial elected element is being economical with the truth. It is ridiculous. A majority of the House voted for a substantial elected element in a new second Chamber, and the Government should be prepared to accept that. If the Government say that this House is predominant, they should listen to what is said here.

This is an extremely important issue. The House should establish its credentials as the proper place to ensure that the manifesto commitments of an incoming Government are implemented in full. It is not just the Cabinet that is committed to making the House of Lords more democratic and representative; it is every single Member on the Government Benches who stood at the last general election on that manifesto and has that mandate.

3.46 pm

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): I raised the case of Cyprus in the Whitsun Adjournment debate on 22 May this year, and in many debates before that, and I return to the case of Cyprus today. I do so because on the surface it appears that many changes have taken place during the past few months; the reality, however, is different.

I remind the House that Turkey invaded Cyprus in July 1974—some 29 years ago—violating just about every conceivable international norm. Two hundred thousand Greek Cypriots were uprooted overnight, 5,000 were killed and some 1,600 are still missing. Countless UN resolutions, debates and efforts to find a solution have been thwarted by Turkey and by the leader of the occupied territory, Mr. Denktash. The Council of Europe regularly finds against Turkey, and the European Court of Human Rights has upheld all cases against Turkey, but no positive responses to its resolutions have been forthcoming from Turkey. It is now being suggested by Turkey that all that has changed. That can easily be refuted.

Yes, indeed, there were general elections in Cyprus in 2002, when AKEL, the socialist party, became the largest party. Yes, indeed, European Union accession negotiations have resulted in Cyprus signing the treaty of accession on 16 April this year. Yes, indeed, a new President, Tassos Papadopoulos, was voted into office on 16 February this year, and the new coalition Government of Mr. Papadopoulos of the Democratic party, DIKO, with AKEL, the Ecologists and the Social Democrats—EDEK, formerly called KISOS—have made an excellent start.

However, none of the above or any other changes, such as allowing Greek Cypriots to visit their own properties and villages in the occupied part of Cyprus, which Mr. Denktash announced some two months ago, has any bearing on an acceptable political solution. There is no solution at present. All we know is that Mr. Denktash said no on 11 March 2003 in The Hague to Mr. Kofi Annan's latest proposals.

To my mind, those UN proposals are now dead, but there are some interesting developments that throw some light on the matter. Turkey is fast losing its influence in the United States and other nation states. It is also deeply in debt. Turkey is totally focused on joining the European Union and it is in a bind. It has an abominable human rights record not only with regard to Cyprus, but in many other respects. Opening up the border between the legitimate part of Cyprus and the occupied part is an attempt to give the impression that democracy and human rights now prevail. Nothing is further from the truth. It has become crystal clear that Turkey should not be invited to start accession negotiations with the European Union until its attitude to human rights has improved considerably.

Like previous UK Governments, this Government apparently remain convinced that Turkey is a humane place and a parliamentary democracy. The other day, our Government mentioned that Turkey had recently given up the death penalty. That is rather curious, since, as a member of the Council of Europe, it should have done so many decades ago.

I therefore ask my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House to convey to the Foreign Secretary the fact that I and many colleagues in the House would want to see real changes in Turkey, and for some considerable time, before even contemplating allowing it to commence accession negotiations.

3.51 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I shall not necessarily follow the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis) down the line that he took, but having been a councillor in the borough of Haringey many years ago, I am well aware of the importance in that area of matters affecting the Cypriot, Greek and

Turkish communities, so I understand why he raised those subjects. Instead, I wish to follow the line taken by colleagues on both sides of the House and raise a number of constituency issues. I should be grateful if the Deputy Leader of the House would convey some of my questions directly to his colleagues.

Constituents have asked me to raise a number of issues before Parliament adjourns for the recess. Some were prompted by recent meetings at parish councils, but the concerns relate to parish, county, regional, national and international issues, so I shall do my best to get through them in the next 10 minutes.

First, on parish issues, I am sure that I speak on behalf of many of us in saying a word of thanks to those who fill places on parish councils and work so hard for us at a local level. We very much appreciate the work that they do. A number of issues that parish council members raised with me can be handled locally, but they wanted me to bring one or two to the House. First, they are still rather uncertain about the Government's view of them. They worry about the burden of regulation and the increasing amount of audit to which they are subject. Do the new proposals for ensuring that members must declare all their interests indicate some degree of suspicion about those on parish councils? Surely not.

I ask the Government to keep constantly under review the bureaucracy that affects parish councils. Will they let us know what representations have been made in the past 12 months about the burden of bureaucracy that parish councils now face, how many vacancies currently exist on parish councils throughout the country and what notification has been given of people leaving parish councils in the past 12 months?

The second issue that parishes raised with me, which has a wider impact, is their concern about young people. Most parishes have the same worries about some youngsters in their localities and the fact that not much guidance is available to them. In trying to do something for them, the same issue repeatedly arises—the lack of adult volunteers who can look after youngsters these days, including those in voluntary groups, uniformed societies and others. We know some of the reasons why that is the case. People are perhaps busier than they have ever been. Those who work away from home have longer travelling times and cannot give their time to the community as they did in the past.

There are other more difficult issues that the Government might consider. Rising insurance is a continuing problem. Everything connected with societies and activities for youngsters seems to attract increasingly large insurance bills these days. That is preventing some activities from taking place. Again, the burden of regulation and the hoops through which people have to jump in order to show that they are fit and proper persons to look after youngsters are significant. No one wants youngsters to be put at risk, but are we placing so many barriers in people's way that we are stopping them coming forward to fulfil roles in local communities that people have filled for many generations? Perhaps as a Parliament and as a nation we might put out a national call to encourage more people to be prepared to lead youngsters, using whatever skills they might have to provide a measure of stability and extra expertise to bring them on in our communities.

Another issue that was raised by the parishes, but applies on a wider county basis, concerns the statement that was made earlier this afternoon by the Secretary of State for Education. Bedfordshire, too, has suffered from the problems in education funding this year. Some 52 schools have applied to run a deficit budget; last year, only 11 schools in the county were in that situation. Four schools have told the county council that they are unable to set a budget. That is clearly very serious.

Although the Secretary of State's admission of error is welcome, I would be grateful if the Government would clear up one particular issue. On 2 May, the Department for Education and Skills sent a letter to my county council asking for information connected with the suggestion that county councils were retaining funds and withholding them from schools. On 12 May, Bedfordshire county council's local education authority replied to the letter, making it very clear that they had indeed passed on the money. The Government have provided no response beyond a generic letter suggesting that its reply was too detailed and that people cannot now expect a proper response. That is not good enough. If my county council is prepared to deal with the Government's allegation, the Government should be prepared to deal properly with the council's response. That would help to assuage the anger that people feel about the matter.

On health, my constituents are worried about the gap in health funding between different parts of the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire strategic health authority. Three Bedfordshire PCTs are underfunded in terms of their distance from target. This year, on average, their distance below target is 4.7 per cent. At the end of this period of funding, which runs until the end of 2005–06, they will still be 4 per cent. below target. By contrast, Hertfordshire authorities are above target and three of them will remain above target at the end of the same period. The plea from Bedfordshire is that the gap between targets and budgets should be closed. When a group of all-party MPs from Bedfordshire went to see the previous Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), he received us very well. I was surprised to learn from him that because the 2001 census figures were being used to calculate expenditure over the next few years, the funding system did not have built into it any provision for an increase in population between the current year and 2005–06. Bedfordshire is expanding very rapidly. Will the Government reconsider their funding mechanism to see whether it could be given any increase in forthcoming years to make up for its rising population?

One of my constituents' concerns reflects a national concern—the problem of Yarl's Wood. Hon. Members will recall that Yarl's Wood, the largest asylum detention centre in Europe, was burned to the ground in February 2002. It is planned to reopen part of it later this year. We still have no information relating to the causes of the fire. The existing building is of the same construction as that which caused the fire, and we are not convinced that those who are detained there and work there will be safe. The criminal trial of those who are suspected of causing the fire, which is currently taking place, is likely to come to an end during the summer. Could the Government delay the reopening of Yarl's Wood until after the trial and the publication of

[Alistair Burt]

the inquiry report so that my constituents and those who will work and be detained at Yarl's Wood can have some idea of why the buildings caught fire so quickly and be sure that it will be safe in future?

On an international point, I, like many people who were born and brought up in the industrial north-west of England, have a passion for hills and mountains: in my case, those close to the Lake District and to north Wales. I draw the House's attention to the international year of the mountain that took place in 2002. I should like to ask the Government for their response to that. The international year of the mountain was designed to give the world an understanding of the issues affecting mountain communities. It was intended to ensure the present and future well-being of mountain communities by promoting conservation and sustainable development, increasing the awareness and knowledge of mountain ecosystems, and by recognising that in much the same way that the world depends on rainforests, it also depends on mountains.

I am indebted to *Trail* magazine and its deputy editor, Matt Swaine, whom I met to discuss these issues, for recognising that these issues are international and also affect this country. Our mountain areas are not as high as some in the world, and are concentrated in Scotland, north Wales and the Lake district. Will the Minister assess and let us know what success or otherwise the Government think that the international year of the mountain has had internationally? As far as this country is concerned, what assessment have the Government made of the impact of the international year of the mountain in the UK, and have they assessed the representations made during that year by those who love the mountains? What mechanism do they have in place for monitoring the resolution of various issues in relation to access, safety and other matters? I would be indebted if he would provide that information.

4.1 pm

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): I was never much of a mathematician but my simple calculation is that I should probably restrict my speech to no more than five minutes, lest all Members who wish to speak do not have the opportunity so to do.

My subject is events in the Brain valley, which may not be as familiar to hon. Members as the Thames valley, the Colorado valley or the Rhine valley. It is nevertheless a picturesque piece of north Essex countryside, which is faced by present threats and problems. The River Brain makes its way down to the Blackwater and thence into the North sea, but the part to which I refer is that further upstream, and particularly involves the villages of Black Notley and White Notley. All villages have some dispute as to the origins of their name, and I am led to believe that one version is that Black Notley was affected by the black death, but those who lived in White Notley escaped that plague. The two villages are two or three miles apart, but between them lies a small hamlet known as the Green, which is adjacent to Black Notley, but most of which is in White Notley. The problem that faces this hamlet is an extension of a golf course.

Black Notley will be familiar to those who have studied science, as it was the birthplace of John Ray, the eminent botanist and naturalist, who in many parts of the world is regarded as superior to Darwin himself. That is certainly the view locally. The threat today is not from a malicious weed, however, but from the extension of a golf course that is already situated there. The golf course already has 27 holes, and its owners intend to extend it by a further nine holes, and thus the little hamlet of the Green will become surrounded by a golf course. To some hon. Members, that might seem to be paradise, but to those who do not play golf it is not.

Primarily, the concern is the loss of high-grade agricultural land, and the extension is strongly opposed by the residents. It is also argued that there is probably not a need. My political division already has eight golf courses—it would be superfluous to name them—and adjacent divisions have others close to our boundaries. The question that I put to the House and thence to the wider world outside is whether there is a need in that particular place. Should it not be incumbent on those who make applications of this kind to provide numbers to show that there is insufficient provision at present? Indeed, it should be incumbent on those at the Notleys course as it now stands to show that there is an over-demand for the playing of golf as opposed to one for the use of the social facilities.

Local plans are mysteries of philosophy that few follow until a problem comes along, at which point people study them with great ardour. The local plan has this to say about the development of golf courses:

> "The development of golf courses on prominent sites, scarp slopes, valleys, exposed plateaux and ridges will not be permitted."

I do not know which of those prominent sites is relevant in this case, but the proposed course is to be on very high ground overlooking the whole sweep of the Brain valley, which has already been defaced by the existing course. The local residents are therefore concerned that there will be a fundamental breach not only of their privacy but of the local plan.

The final argument against the extension to the golf course, which would cause great harm to local residents, is the dangerous condition of the country road that winds its way along the slope of the Brain valley between the proposed golf course and the existing one. A 40 mph limit applies on that road, but those hon. Members who represent rural divisions will know that the adherence to such limits is not as strict as one might like it to be. One can imagine the risk to the lives of motorists and golfers as the golfers walk across the road with their trolleys, chatting to each other about the state of play at hole 27, as they make their way over to hole 28.

I raise this matter not because I am opposed to golf or because I believe that there should not be golf courses. There should, however, be a limit to the number of golf courses and to the number of holes that each course is permitted. We should strike a balance between the construction of golf courses and the preservation of our historic and scenic countryside, and we should give the latter the greater priority, rather than creating a surfeit of golf courses for which there appears to be no immediate need.

4.6 pm

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute): I am privileged to represent a constituency that contains the most beautiful scenery in the country. However, the drawback of such a large and remote constituency is that transport issues are always to the fore. Cutting the costs and increasing the frequency of transport links are vital to expanding economic activity and public services in the highlands and islands. That is why I want to use the opportunity of this debate to speak in favour of the HITRANS—the Highlands and Islands Strategic Transport Partnership—proposals for creating a network of frequent and affordable integrated air services throughout the highlands and islands and to other destinations such as Glasgow and Edinburgh.

The proposals will also mean improvements to the infrastructure of island airports and new construction work to provide, for the first time, scheduled air services to Oban, and from Oban to the islands of Coll and Colonsay. The market alone cannot build up and sustain such a network; Government financial support is required. The scheme has strong support from the Scottish Executive and from local government throughout the highlands and islands, but, because it requires public service obligations—PSOs—to be put on the routes, it also needs the support of the UK Department for Transport. That is because the decision to apply to the European Union for permission to impose a PSO on the network is a reserved power vested in the Department for Transport here. I hope that the Government will support this exciting new initiative, and I stress that it will not cost the Government here a penny; all the costs will be paid for by the Scottish Executive and local councils.

I hope that the Government will support the scheme and actively seek to persuade the European Union of the need for this PSO. The use of PSOs to secure regional air services at affordable fares and a regular frequency is commonplace throughout the rest of Europe. Countries such as France, Spain, Portugal and Norway use PSOs frequently for this purpose. Given that the highlands and islands are the most sparsely populated area of Europe, surely we can do the same there. I believe that this is the only way to regenerate the economy of the highlands and islands and reverse centuries of population decline in the remoter parts of the region.

I also want to speak briefly about broadband. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee got it right in its recent report when it called on the Government to develop a strategy to make broadband accessible to all, and to set out the funding to be made available and the steps to be taken, according to a clear timetable, to achieve this objective.

A few years ago, we were all hopeful that the internet would be a great benefit to businesses in remote rural areas, allowing them to compete with businesses based in urban areas on equal terms in many fields. However, because of the slow progress of broadband installation, that objective is very much in doubt. If we leave broadband installation up to the market, it is obvious that remote areas of the country will never be connected. The amounts of money that the Government have so far given are insufficient to enable broadband connection in remote areas. Telecommunications is a reserved power, so I urge the Government to act urgently, implement the report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and ensure that broadband access is available to everyone.

I conclude by giving an example of a Government official who does not appreciate the geography of the highlands and islands. One of the staff at the Government's much maligned tax credit helpline told one of my constituents in Campbeltown to go to his nearest tax office in Rothesay to collect an emergency payment. Those familiar with the geography of the west highlands will know that, to do that round trip, my constituent would have to make four ferry journeys and drive 128 miles. I am sure that the House will agree that the helpline was not particularly helpful.

Given the unique geography of the highlands and islands, unique solutions are often required to solve the problems created by that geography. I urge the Government, and, most important, their helpline officials, always to bear that geography in mind.

4.11 pm

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I want to speak on genetic modification. I believe that, with the exception of Iraq, GM is the most important issue that the House faces. Tomorrow is the closing date for the Government's public debate on genetic modification. Six days ago, the strategy unit reported on the costs and benefits of GM crops. Two weeks ago, the European Parliament ruled on labelling, traceability and co-existence of GMOs and GM crops, in effect ending the moratorium on commercial growing of GM crops in Europe. Today, the Food Standards Agency released its findings on consumer views on GM food. The science review is expected next week. However, we have not had a single debate on the Floor of the House about the momentous decision that could be taken in our name before the end of this year.

The public remain hostile to GM, yet we, their elected representatives, are woefully unengaged in a debate that could lead to our constituents having no choice but to eat GM food. Why do I say no choice? Because evidence is growing that gene flow is a reality, and that once GM crops are grown commercially in this country their genetically modified traits will spread to non-GM crops and weeds. That phenomenon makes it extremely unlikely that the status of non-GM crops and organic crops co-existing with GM crops could be guaranteed. Without that guarantee, consumers will be denied choice, and the unpredictable consequences of GMOs in our food chain and our living environment will be irreversible.

Recent studies have shown that pollen can move much further than previously predicted. In Australia, herbicide-tolerant oilseed rape was found to cross-pollinate with oilseed rape up to 3 km from the source fields, yet the separation distance currently used in the test crops in Britain is only 200 m. French researchers have shown that the seeds of sugar beet weeds can travel more than 1 km from their source by hitch-hiking on farm machinery, leading the researchers to predict that the likelihood of gene flow through seeds has been much underestimated.

Even more spectacular than the evidence of scientific studies is the experience of Canadian farmers, who enthusiastically embraced commercial growing of GM

[Joan Ruddock]

crops in the mid-1990s. About 75 per cent. of Canadian canola—oilseed rape to us—is GM herbicide-tolerant, enabling farmers to treat weeds with chemicals such as Round Up without harm to the plant. Not only has herbicide-tolerant gene flow to non-GM plants been a problem, but farmers growing entirely GM crops have experienced difficulties that seriously undermine the whole rationale of herbicide tolerance.

GM seeds shed at harvest time remain in the ground and germinate in future years. The result is that treating fields with, for example, Round Up before sowing a GM crop is no longer sufficient, as many of the weeds—or "volunteers" as they are called—are tolerant of the herbicide. The solution is to add a herbicide to the pack to kill the volunteers that have been modified for tolerance to the main herbicide. Thus a regime that was supposed to reduce herbicide use and introduce more benign herbicides now includes the much more toxic 2.4D and paraquat.

Resistance to more than one herbicide is also occurring, by a process of gene-stacking from the pollination of one herbicide-tolerant variety by another. In a paper reviewing the Canadian experience, English Nature said that it believed that such processes would be undesirable in Britain and out of keeping with our agri-environment policy. Gene flow, however, is not the only issue in the debate about the co-existence of GM and non-GM crops and consumer choice of foods. Contamination incidents are becoming more and more frequent. We expect new European laws to be enacted later this year, which will give more teeth to traceability and listing; but if crops are grown commercially in the United Kingdom, such laws may serve only to prove that separation has become impossible.

In August last year, GM oilseed rape grown in the UK for farm scale evaluation was found to be contaminated with another GM variety that was not approved for use. In the United States last November, soya beans destined for human consumption were mixed with GM maize containing genes to produce pharmaceuticals. The two crops had been grown in rotation on the same land.

Once again, the experience of Canadian farmers is most telling. In a recent sample of 35 canola seeds, 95 per cent. were found to be contaminated by GM, and 50 per cent. of those had double resistance to glyfosate and glufosinate. As a consequence of contamination, organic canola farming on the prairies of Canada is impossible, and has been abandoned by most in the business. The Canadian experience is devastating. I have dealt only with the science, not with the farmers' many bad experiences with Monsanto, but suffice it to say that virtually all the agriculture industry—including the Canadian National Farmers Union and the Canadian Wheat Board—now oppose the introduction of GM wheat to Canada.

Friends of the Earth has looked at how that experience would be translated in Britain. It recently mapped out, for the first time, the locations of five of the wild plant varieties that are most closely related to oilseed rape, such as wild turnip and wild cabbage. The maps show that those species, which are known to cross-pollinate with the arable crop, are widespread across the country. That suggests that if GM oilseed rape is grown practically anywhere in the UK, cross-breeding will be almost inevitable.

Experience is also being gained in the use of the herbicides themselves. One of the most positive points made about GM was that it could reduce the use of herbicides. Studies show that a decline in the use of chemicals on GM Bt cotton has taken place, while there have been no such results in the case of GM soya beans. The failure of GM-tolerant maize to provide the weed control advantages that were anticipated has necessitated the addition of the persistent chemical atrazine to the glufosinate weed killers designed to be used with GM crops. Furthermore, a GeneWatch study of GM Bt cotton suggests that even its success may be short-lived, as pests not killed by the Bt are on the increase.

I have dealt with only a few of the environmental issues surrounding GM crops in highly developed countries. The problems that such crops might inflict on the diverse and fragile environments of developing countries could be even more acute. Time does not permit me to pursue the potential health effects, but I know that a recent paper in "Nutrition and Health" found that there had been only 10 published studies of the health effects of GM food and feed. More than half were carried out in collaboration with GM companies. They found no effects on body organs, whereas several of the independent studies found unexplained changes.

GM is still a very new and untried technology for environmental release. This Government have worked hard to develop a sustainable agriculture policy, which would be fatally undermined by the commercialisation of GM crops. I urge my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House to ensure that a full debate take place on this subject when we return in September, so that Members can take account of the wealth of information now available that points to the completely unacceptable effects of commercialising GM crops in this country.

4.20 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): There are several points that I wish to raise before the House adjourns for the summer recess, and I shall try to deal with them very quickly. The first concerns Jo Martinson, a constituent of mine who died in a car accident last year at the age of 19. She was driving along Hamlet Court road with her boyfriend, and Mr. X, who was in a van, backed out of a turning, causing her to swerve into a tree. As a result, she lost her life.

The Solicitor-General has done everything that she possibly can to try to help the grieving parents and family of Jo Martinson to try to get justice for their daughter. As of this moment, there has been no trial of the person who is believed to have been in the vehicle responsible for Jo's death. Jo's family are very angry, and I should certainly be failing in my duty were I not to continue to raise this issue until justice has been done. Jo's mother recently wrote to me following a letter from the Rayleigh road policing unit. She says that she read Mr. X's letter

"with a now familiar sense of disbelief; he has chosen to reflect on that which is accepted yet ignore salient, contentious issues.

The Director of Public Prosecutions reported that 'The offence, (no insurance), was alleged to have been committed on 7th November 2001, but the Police did not lay the information until 24th May 2002, seventeen days after the six month limitation had expired'. He continued: 'it could not be argued that the Police were unaware of the insurance matter'.

As you know, he was clear that: 'in advising the Police to support any charges relating to Miss Martinson's death, the reviewing Crown Prosecutor did advise that the other Road Traffic Act offences relating to Mr. X's vehicle were made out . . . it remains the responsibility of Police to start proceedings'."

The Solicitor-General agreed with those points. My constituent continues:

"The police clearly did not follow advice. The Solicitor General recognised errors and allegations 'should have been pursued, and they were not'.

It is therefore difficult not to take issue with

the letter from Rayleigh, which was "dismissive" and "irrelevant". She continues by saying that, "incredibly", the gentleman writing the letter

"considered the newspaper statement accurate and acceptable, suggesting complacency is a standard Police response."

My constituent feels that the gentleman from Rayleigh attempted to evade the issues and to evade responsibility.

Mr. X's car—which backed out into the road, thereby causing the accident—was untaxed and not roadworthy, and Mr. X had only one eye. To this day, all that has happened is that he has received a £60 fine.

The second issue is the trial of three British nationals that is taking place in Egypt. My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and the hon. Members for West Ham (Mr. Banks) and for East Ham (Mr. Timms) are also affected by that trial, on which we have spent a great deal of time. The three Britons are accused of being involved in an organisation that is intent on undermining the Egyptian Government. The trial has been in the national news and has gone on for a very long time. It has been started and then stopped, and I am delighted that Baroness Symons has made a very strong statement about it. Those involved became ill when they were brought to court, and the trial was again stopped. However, I am delighted to say that today, the defence will be heard. We had a meeting with the Egyptian ambassador, and I hope that matters will now proceed very swiftly and that there will be a successful outcome for our constituents.

The Secretary of State for Education made his statement to the House, which we all welcome. I hope that it has not come too late for Southend where, on average, secondary schools face a £400,000 shortfall in funding and primary schools face a £50,000 shortfall. The chairman of the local secondary heads association has written to me to say that

"several schools in Southend are forced to declare deficit budgets in this current year (including my own), and we are having to meet LEA officers to draw up four-year recovery plans. In my school, we are in the absurd position of having a £3 million new extension project due to open this September, but we will not have the money to clean it or maintain it!"

That is absolutely crazy.

Marvellous things are happening in education in my constituency. We have a new special needs centre; I was fortunate enough to be present at the opening of the Whitehall performing arts centre, which is adjoined to Eastwood school; I shall be going to the opening of a new sports centre shortly. I hope that the school funding fiasco never happens again.

My next point concerns mobile phone masts. I am totally dissatisfied with the way in which this matter continues to be handled. The Library briefing states:

"Mobile telephones emit radio waves that can penetrate human tissue, producing a heating effect. Safety guidelines produced by the National Radiological Protection Board are based solely on avoiding the known biological consequences of excess heating."

Sir William Stewart amplified his warnings to the British Association in September 2001, and called for the cost of handsets to be increased to restrict their use by children. He said also that he would not allow his grandchildren to use a mobile phone. Concern about children relates partly to the thinness of their skulls; up to 50 per cent. more radiation is absorbed by children compared with adults. I should have thought that, following the recent disgraceful episodes concerning the abuse of the internet, this House owes it to our children to give a greater steer on the overuse of mobile phones than we have at the moment.

This week, a campaign called "Keep Mail on Rail" visited this House. I was concerned to learn from a constituent that the mail is to be taken off the railways and put on the roads. I agree with those who lobbied us saying that that would result in increased pollution, undermine the Government's transport policy, cause significant job losses and result in an inferior delivery service. The gentleman who suggested this change does not have a marvellous track record of success and I hope that Ministers will look at it again.

On crime, I hope that the Minister will urge the Home Office to look again at the pay and conditions of police officers. In Southend, we are continuing to lose police officers to the Met, where the pay is £6,000 more. There has also been a cut in overtime. We have seen drug offences rising by 16 per cent. over the last year, with violent crime up by 20 per cent. and gun crime up by 35 per cent. Anyone who says that we do not need more police is wrong.

In conclusion, if any Members want to pop to Southend to enjoy our glorious summer, they will receive a warm welcome.

4.29 pm

Tom Cox (Tooting): I wish to speak about Pakistan. I declare an interest as I am the chairperson of the British-Pakistani parliamentary group. We are an active group of Members of both Houses of Parliament with a close relationship with the Pakistan High Commissioner here in London. I am also the chairperson of the United Kingdom Commonwealth Parliamentary Association branch, but I do not speak in that capacity today.

What Members of both Houses who belong to the all-party group on Pakistan seek is Pakistan's return to full membership of the Commonwealth. I understand that the Commonwealth ministerial action group will meet in September to discuss the issue. Nine Commonwealth countries are members of that group, and they will make the recommendation for or against Pakistan's return to full membership of the Commonwealth. The United

[Tom Cox]

Kingdom is not a member of the action group, but has great influence within the Commonwealth, as I well know, and I seek the UK's support on the matter before the discussions take place.

We all know that the history of Pakistan since independence has been clouded with problems. There have been military takeovers and parliamentary elections in which different political parties have been elected. When those parliamentary elections took place, we all hoped that the elected Government would bring about real changes within Pakistan. Sadly, that did not happen for a variety of reasons, including Government incompetence, general corruption and corruption at the highest level.

Pakistan is a country of 130 million people and it has close links with the UK. Large communities of people came to this country from Pakistan. They have made their homes here, but they all retain links with Pakistan. They are proud of the country of their birth. When I meet them locally, I find—as I am sure do other hon. Members—that they always mention Pakistan's return to full membership of the Commonwealth. I would like the Government to give their fullest support in discussions before the ministerial action group meets.

Let us reflect on the appalling political circumstances of Pakistan in 1999. General Musharraf took power—thankfully, in a bloodless takeover—and said clearly that the return to parliamentary democracy, free of corruption and the incompetence of political parties, and with the support of the people of Pakistan, was a key commitment. I am delighted, as is the all-party group, to say that progress has been made in Pakistan in respect of many of the problems that it faces. Tough action has been taken to root out corruption at every level of government.

We all know about the evils of terrorism in Pakistan, involving various terrorist groups, including the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Pakistan faces the ongoing problems that resulted from the military actions in Afghanistan against the former Soviet Union, and the more recent military action after which nearly 2 million people went into Pakistan as refugees. That is Pakistan's responsibility, and it is to the country's credit that it has—with very little help from any other organisation in the world—housed, fed and done everything possible to support those refugees.

As a further example of what is happening in Pakistan, elections for the national assembly took place on 10 October last year. Out of more than 70 million registered voters, over 29 million voted. The assembly met on 16 November last year and was in session until 22 April this year. Several parties were elected to the assembly, including three major parties. There is clearly a move to parliamentary democracy in Pakistan.

Recently, President Musharraf made an official visit to the UK. He met many senior politicians, including the Prime Minister. He also met the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, and I am told—I am not a member of the Committee—that a frank discussion took place between the President and members of the Committee. After that meeting, the President spoke to a well-attended meeting of the all-party Pakistan group. He was frank and honest with us, and explained the problems that he faces. He also spoke of his commitment to govern Pakistan with the help of members of the national assembly and the people of Pakistan, and to see that the move to parliamentary democracy continues. The President then went to Washington, where he had several meetings with President Bush.

The meetings in London and Washington are clear signs that Pakistan is being accepted by the world—and rightly so—as it returns to parliamentary democracy. The need to encourage the return to parliamentary democracy and the introduction of many other reforms, for which the President readily accepts the need, is so important that the all-party Pakistan group believes that it is essential to grant the country a return to full membership of the Commonwealth. The UK, while not a member of the group that will make that decision, has enormous influence on it. I know that because as the chairperson of the United Kingdom Commonwealth Parliamentary Association branch, I meet Heads of Commonwealth countries regularly and chat about many issues. I know the respect and influence that this country has in the Commonwealth, and that is why I have sought to raise this important issue today.

4.38 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): As a result of bad odours in south Essex, residents have felt great anger and fear. People's quality of life has been severely damaged, and many have reported serious health consequences. Therefore, the *Yellow Advertiser* ran a campaign and a coupon petition. Many residents wrote in and, as a result of the campaign and the information about their experience, several recommendations were put forward, which I will now summarise for the House.

The first recommendation was to establish funding and support for 24-hour testing of air quality by general circulation models, strategically placed to monitor areas around Pitsea landfill, BP Coryton and other key sites. BP has agreed to install its own monitors, but only for the first three months. The second is to ensure that all information is passed to the Environment Agency and made public within 14 days via the agency's website, so the public know what is going on if it happens again in the future. Experience has shown that the Environment Agency has in the past relied solely on air quality data and notification of breaches supplied by the very operators that it is supposed to be regulating. This so-called self-regulation is not economic for the Environment Agency; there is an obvious conflict of interest and it is not an effective way to monitor possible offenders.

Thirdly, the analysis and testing on samples of emissions taken at Pitsea in May this year by Golder Associates should continue until irrefutable evidence that they pose no threat to health is available to the public on the Environment Agency's website. Fourthly, if any possible health risks are identified, all appropriate legal action must be pursued against the offender. That has not been done, even though there have been smells for seven months.

Fifthly, under current legislation, environmental health departments are unable to take action of any kind against offenders polluting the environment from a neighbouring district or borough. The Pitsea tip is in the

constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron), although the smells mostly impact on my constituents who live next door to the tip. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his great campaigning efforts on this matter.

The problem has meant that Castle Point borough council's environmental health department has been unable to bring any action against Cleanaway, the pit operator, even though the smells have caused serious health problems—that has not been refuted—for several months. Although it is accepted that the Environment Agency has that responsibility, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs should investigate the matter with a view to preventing a culture of buck passing. That has been the greatest and most persistent complaint that residents have made to me and the *Yellow Advertiser* over the past six months.

Sixthly, through the *Yellow Advertiser*, residents asked Ministers to investigate how the Environment Agency deals with bad smells in the future with a view to developing a protocol of proactive guidelines to regulate how it investigates and pursues any reoccurrence of the problem. That will avoid the trial-and-error approach that was adopted at Pitsea from February 2003. That led to a haphazard and, ultimately, longer remedial process, and therefore much longer suffering for the residents of Castle Point than was necessary.

For example, if the Environment Agency receives 10 or more complaints of odours that are accompanied by reports from doctors of possible health symptoms within a 24-hour period, GCMs testing should be deployed to pinpoint the source and to identify the compounds present at the earliest possible moment so that action can follow and the public can be reassured rather than left unduly concerned for six months, as happened this year.

The Environment Agency did not test the emissions despite numerous reports of stinging eyes, choking, nausea, inability to sleep, headaches and even a death from asthma on a playing field close to the tip. Instead, it relied on archaic wind direction reports and physical smell checks to pinpoint the source. In today's technological world, that is just not good enough. It amounts to a "Dad's Army" type farce, and is both incompetent and unacceptable.

I congratulate the *Yellow Advertiser* on its superb and public-spirited campaign, with Steve Neale at the helm. The newspaper did a great job looking after the public interest.

I turn now to the Government's attack on communities through their policies for post offices, chemists, police stations and, indeed, fire stations and retained fire officers. In particular, however, I shall consider post offices. There are 11 million pensioners and 5 million of them collect their money from post offices and 1 million of them do not have bank or building society accounts. They do not want to deal with banks; they fear that as they are anxious about PIN numbers and technology. The Government's policy has not been thought through. They are driving post offices out of business, and that shows a callous attitude towards the elderly people who put the "Great" in Britain. They created the wealth of this country, but do not get a fair share of it. Retired people deserve better.

The Government must have a cooling-off period in which to make it much clearer to everyone that they can be exempt from the changes if they so wish and can remain exempt for as long as they wish. The Government should promote and not damage post office accounts.

Let me give an example from the mail that I have received during the past two weeks. Mr. K.S. of Canvey Island wrote to me saying that he had decided to apply to have his pension paid into a Post Office account. He said:

"A welcome pack duly arrived with an information leaflet containing at least six reasons why I should go to a Bank or building society rather than my chosen course. One of these was that the administrator of this scheme disclaimed any liability for any discrepancies or failure to pay money into my new account, very reassuring!"

He continued:

"since this government have been in power it has become increasingly obvious that the general public and the pensioners in particular are being treated with complete contempt".

I put that matter to one side and turn to the European Union. On 14 July, I asked the Government how many regulations originating from the EU have been implemented by the Cabinet Office in each of the past five years. The Government replied that the average figure was 2,800. That is costing business an enormous amount. The British Chambers of Commerce says that there is too much regulation. It claims that the situation destroys jobs and the economy, undermines investment in this country and removes our competitive advantage, especially over continental Europe. Such regulation runs alongside massive business tax hikes and 60 stealth tax rises, so the Labour Government are leading the country toward a high tax and low wealth generation economy. They are taking the "Great" out of Britain.

It is time for us to consider the common agricultural policy again—it was past its time some 20 years ago. The policy is too costly, it damages international development and it is holding back enlargement, which would improving security on continental Europe. The control and subsidy of agriculture in this country should be repatriated to this country for the benefit of our farmers, all British consumers, our environment and the developing international community.

4.47 pm

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in the debate. The League Against Cruel Sports recently made me aware of welfare concerns surrounding greyhound racing. I am not an opponent of the sport. Indeed, I have attended many events, although I always manage to leave them with less money than when I started.

I was unaware—like many hon. Members, I am sure—of the industry's problems until recently. Thousands of dogs go missing each year after their racing careers have ended, as do thousands of puppies that do not make the grade required to race. There are worries about what happens when dogs are racing. We should examine issues such as the size of tracks and the treatment that dogs receive in kennels.

I emphasise again that neither the League Against Cruel Sports nor I think that the sport is inherently cruel, unlike hunting with dogs. I do not advocate a ban

[Mark Tami]

on the sport, but real issues must be addressed. Reform is required, and the ideal tool with which to achieve reform is the animal welfare Bill that we expect to be published in draft later this year.

As long ago as 1990, the Home Affairs Committee conducted an inquiry into the greyhound racing industry. Although the report concentrated on the financing of the industry, it made reference to animal welfare concerns, especially the problem of re-homing dogs. The Committee recommended that track owners and bookmakers should be required to donate part of their profits to the Retired Greyhound Trust. It is a great shame that, some 13 years later, that has still not happened.

As hon. Members may be aware, the greyhound racing industry is extremely lucrative. For example, the Walthamstow track has an annual turnover in excess of £8 million. Many greyhound stadiums are set to apply for casino status under the proposed gambling Bill, so the tracks will probably become more profitable. There is no doubt that there is a lot of money in the business, but a miniscule percentage of the money bet on greyhound racing goes toward the welfare of the dogs. That is pitiful and a great shame. I support the league's campaign to give a penny in the pound of gambling turnover to the welfare of the dogs. They deserve more than that, in my opinion.

There are welfare concerns about the greyhounds before their careers begin. About 5,500 are bred for racing each year across the country. Many of them sell for more than £1,000. Some 2,000 of the puppies, however, never make it to the tracks; they just disappear. The same problem occurs in Ireland on a much greater scale. We have to assume the worst and accept that they are not all humanely put to sleep by vets. Licensing greyhound breeders is a way to address that problem. All puppies could be registered at birth and the statistics published in full. That would avoid the misery experienced by thousands of puppies that go missing each year, many of which are killed in a less than humane way.

There is also the massive problem of re-homing retired greyhounds after their racing careers have ended. That is mainly due to lack of provision. Some 10,000 greyhounds retire from British greyhound racing each year. Most of them are untraceable. Only about 2,000 a year are known to be re-homed by welfare groups, including the Retired Greyhound Trust. That figure is extremely worrying. A strategy clearly needs to be put in place so that every dog is re-homed, not just the 20 per cent. that are currently re-homed.

Although greyhound owners should accept responsibility for their dogs, so must the industry. Contrary to popular belief, greyhounds are suitable as pets. I am sure that many owners keep their dogs after they finish racing. However, that is perhaps not the case for the majority. Once the dogs start to cost their owners money instead of making them money, the owners are tempted with a quick way out of the tie of keeping the dog. We must address that.

There are also concerns about the dogs' welfare during their racing careers. That is sometimes difficult to detect, but some conditions in which the dogs run damage their health and welfare. Dogs frequently have to run around very tight bends or run with minor injuries. Track surfaces are often the cause of concern, with too hard or too soft surfaces causing injury to the dogs. Paddy Sweeney, Britain's best known greyhound vet, argues that tracks should have a larger radius to enable the greyhounds to run upright so that their joints are not strained by the centrifugal force exerted on them when they run around tight bends. The suggested recommendation is that all new tracks should have a radius of at least 80 m.

Track vets are employed by racing promoters, which means that they may come under pressure not to pull dogs out of races if they are injured. Clearly, we cannot generalise about the standards of the vets employed in the industry, and I am sure that they are of the highest quality. I merely explain that they may come under pressure to make the "right" decision. Perhaps the solution is for an independent body to employ the vet, who would have full rights to stop races and/or withdraw dogs if they are unfit to race. Vets are solely there to look after the welfare of the dogs. It is also necessary to have fixed minimum standards at track kennels. I remember reading about the dog Football Focus, which died in track kennels at Catford last year owing to the lack of air conditioning. We must prevent accidents like that occurring.

The greyhound industry does not protest about the lack of funding for welfare. Both the British Greyhound Racing Board and the National Greyhound Racing Club were invited to make a submission to the consultation on the animal welfare Bill. Neither thought it sufficiently important to respond. The Department for Culture Media and Sport has spoken to the industry about greyhound welfare and recognises that there is room for improvement.

In May 2002, the greyhound industry signed up to the charter of racing greyhounds. Although that is welcome, it is not binding and does not by any means cover all the issues that need to be addressed, especially the employment of independent vets. The league's idea of a penny in the pound for greyhound welfare has a great deal of merit. That would take the form of a statutory levy, similar to the one in the horse-racing industry. The provision would enable homes to be found for the 12,000 dogs that are surplus to requirements every year and could also go towards grants to upgrade tracks and kennels. It could even enable the micro-chipping of dogs so that they can be monitored and so that the circumstances surrounding those that go missing can be properly investigated.

The animal welfare Bill that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will introduce will provide an ideal opportunity to address this issue. I urge right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House to support that measure. It is a long-awaited Bill that will provide the necessary means to reform the industry of greyhound racing by making better provision for greyhounds, upon whose welfare the industry relies, and ensure its continued success, which I am sure we all want.

4.55 pm

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): I shall touch on two issues in my 10-minute slot, which I shall try not to use in full. The first issue has already been mentioned,

and that is Iraq. The number of speeches on Iraq indicates that Members wish to see the issue debated fully and properly. Perhaps there is a need for a cross-cutting Question Time on the matter, given that a number of different Departments are dealing with restructuring and humanitarian aid. There are serious questions to be asked, and some confusion has arisen from Ministers' answers. A debate would give us the opportunity to resolve that confusion.

I shall give an example. On 25 June, the Prime Minister told the House that the Iraqis were being disarmed. It was clear by implication that they were being entirely disarmed. Having been to Iraq with the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) at the beginning of June, I knew that the Prime Minister's answer was not fully correct. I asked the Ministry of Defence the same question: what was being done to disarm the Iraqis? The answer was slightly different from that of the Prime Minister. I was told that they were being allowed to hold on to non-automatic rifles and small arms. Again, that is not a fully correct answer. I was told clearly on two occasions by British commanders while I was in Iraq that they were allowing Iraqis to hold on to automatic weapons for their self-defence. Some clarity is required.

We need a debate. We also need a Question Time that will enable us to get answers from the Government. I have written to the Prime Minister on that issue and I am still waiting for a reply. It will not come this side of the recess; I suppose that it could be waiting in my pigeonhole, but I doubt it.

A number of other issues arose while we went round with the different battle groups. A huge number of munitions are lying around on the ground. It is horrifying. The Iraqi third army used metal containers as ammunition dumps. These containers are scattered across the desert, and little is being done to clear them up. The poverty of a number of tribal groups is such that children are being sent into the containers to take munitions out of wooden boxes so that they can be burned to boil water. Water has to be boiled because there is no clean water supply. At one location, mortar shells were scattered on the ground, the wooden boxes having been removed.

The poverty is such that the metals that make the shells have a value on the black market. Children are taking the shells back to their families, so that the shells can be taken apart and the metals sold on the black market. It is not surprising that a number of children have lost their lives doing this. The Army is doing what it can to advise and warn parents. It has a poster campaign. It is doing the best that it can with the resources at its disposal to clear up the munitions. However, it does not have sufficient resources.

An electricity supply is necessary so that water can be boiled by that means. The electricity system was installed by the Russians. Some power stations were damaged during the first Gulf war, and they have not been repaired since. Some power stations are running at only 10 or 20 per cent. of their capacity. The system is interlinked so that different power stations have to be online before there can be a supply. I have asked why the Russians are not there helping to rebuild their power stations. They put them in and they understand them. However, they are not there. Serious questions need to be asked. Why are we not engaging the Russians in the rebuilding of the power station system?

The Army is doing all that it can to provide and maintain a water supply. Damage is being done to the water supply, and more needs to be done to maintain it, not by the Army but by the Department for International Development, other Departments and the UN. It is frustrating that British soldiers constantly have to repair electrical cables and the water supply when their primary task should be security and maintaining law and order. To put it bluntly, there are not enough non-governmental organisations to do the work, and there is not enough aid from the Government.

I shall touch on two final issues to do with Iraq. First, we visited a doctor's surgery. It had been looted at the end of the conflict and everything was taken. The Army had done a wonderful job, because it arranged for builders to put new doors and locks on, and made arrangements to help with the restocking. The UN had provided some drugs, and the surgery also had some shelves. From its limited budget, the Army provided a refrigerator to keep drugs at the right temperature, but essential items were missing from the pharmacy. I was given a list, by the lady doctor in charge, of the basic equipment that was required, including an autoclave, a baravan, stethoscopes, a water cooler, air conditioning so that drugs could be kept for longer, bandages, and simple chairs and tables. Why, several weeks after the end of the conflict, was more not being done to make sure that those essential items for the running of a medical centre were provided?

Secondly, I asked DFID what we were doing to help restore the banking system, which is in chaos. However, I have to say that when I worked in Iraq in 1982, the banking system was in chaos—the exchange rate at the bank was very different from what it was on the black market. The Army has had to provide help to establish and run the bank in Basra. The Army has many tasks and talents, but running banks is not one of which I am aware. However, it is doing what it can to try to provide stability. When DFID says that it is doing nothing to help the banking system, I despair, because we ought to be doing something to help it. Getting it running properly is essential to the economy. I therefore hope that the Government will give us more time to debate those important issues.

I shall touch briefly on another issue on which I have been trying to press the Government for answers—the present status of general development orders. The Government are currently reviewing the planning structure, but nothing is going to be done about general development orders, which allow dock companies, railway companies and airports to build what they like on their land, provided that it has something to do with the running of the port, airport or the railway line. Those developments can have a dramatic impact on people who live close to them. Railtrack is currently putting up mobile phone masts along the length of its tracks. No planning consent is required—it can just build them. Local people fear that, once those structures are up, if Railtrack applies for commercial use it will be hard for inspectors to refuse such an application. The structures are already in place, so it would be illogical for inspectors to turn down that application and say,

[Richard Younger-Ross]

"You've got a structure, but don't use it." Many communities fear that unsightly phone masts are being constructed for commercial use at a later date.

I shall give an example in my constituency, which includes Teignmouth port. I wish it every success, but it has the right to build whatever it likes on the quay. A few years ago, it took down its old sheds and built a new one. Someone standing in their front garden in Alexander terrace can see a short bit of road—it is about the same length as the distance between the Government and Opposition Benches—then a railway line and another bit of road, with a tin shed along half its length which is about as high as the lower part of the Chamber. The railway track runs between the tin wall and the houses, and the tin wall acts as an echo chamber. No environmental consideration was given to its construction. If there had been a normal planning process, no one would have allowed such a structure to be built, creating such environmental damage. We need to review general development orders. I am not suggesting that they should be part of the normal local authority planning process, but something needs to be done to impose some control on what is allowed to be built by our ports and airports. At present, they can build what they like.

5.5 pm

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): On Monday I received a helpful response to a question that I had tabled to the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration. I want to share the information with other Members, and I hope it will be passed on to their constituents to whom it applies.

My question was:

"when the two-year probationary period to qualify for indefinite leave to remain will come into force."

The reply from the Minister stated:

"The two-year probationary period on marriage was introduced as one of a number of changes made to the Immigration Rules in 1 April 2003.

The changes were part of a package of measures to tackle the growing menace of fraudulent or abusive marriages to circumvent immigration control."

For hon. Members who do not deal with such cases, I should explain that over the past six years I have dealt with about 40 cases of young women who were not forced into marriage, but went along willingly with the arrangements made by their parents to marry a young first cousin in Pakistan. They went over to Pakistan to marry him and subsequently came back and applied to act as a sponsor to bring the young husband to the UK. He came here, and shortly before the year was out, the young lady would apply for indefinite leave to remain for him.

What happened in about 40 cases that came to my attention was that as soon as the young men received their indefinite leave to remain, they left their wife and went to live with the extended family. Sometimes the girls would be pregnant by that time and would be extremely upset. Their parents were extremely upset because they had arranged the marriage. The girl would come to me and say, "I want him deported", and I had to say, "I'm sorry, you've just applied for him to have indefinite leave to remain. There is nothing that I or the Government can do. He is going to stay. He has his indefinite leave to remain."

The change is that the man cannot have indefinite leave to remain for two years. It is not much of a concession, but it will help to deter young men who were planning to come to the UK and get round immigration controls. The Government could probably go further. Often the young men go back to Pakistan, meet up with the young lady whom they would have married in any case, go through a marriage in Pakistan, come back and apply to act as a sponsor to bring the Pakistani young lady over as their wife. They are entitled to do that. They have indefinite leave to remain, so they can apply to act as a sponsor.

The situation would be helped and the young men would be deterred from doing that if a further measure were introduced by law specifying that they had to have citizenship before becoming a sponsor. That would take about five years from entering the country. It would deter the young men from putting those young ladies through a terrible experience. Having done all they could to make for a good marriage, the girls are cast to one side in favour of a woman whose marriage to the man had probably already been arranged.

I shall mention two other changes that were made on 1 April. A further measure was

"introducing a 'no switching' into marriage provision after entry to the United Kingdom for those coming for a short period of six months or less".—[*Official Report*, 14 July 2003; Vol. 409, c. 54W.]

That means that those who have come to the country on visitors' visas cannot suddenly and conveniently find a wife in order to get indefinite leave to remain.

The other measure prevents someone from acting as a sponsor in a marriage or fiancée application until the prospective spouse is 18. Personally, I would prefer the age 21 to be specified, but 18 is very welcome. The measure will protect girls from being forced into marriage and taken back to Pakistan for that purpose when they are aged 15 or 16. It will ensure that their parents will know in advance that they cannot act as sponsors until the girl is 18, so they will probably not trouble to take her back until they are 18 to go through the procedure of arranging a marriage and acting as sponsors.

That measure will help many girls. I believe that most of the girls who are forced into marriage are very young and are aged 15, 16 or 17. If they can mature that little bit more, until they are 18, they will have a much better chance of taking on their parents in an argument and saying, "I do not mind having an arranged marriage, but I do not want to go back to Pakistan to marry this particular person." I think that the measure will help a great deal.

It would also be a good idea to apply such an age limit to people applying to come to the United Kingdom, so that when someone is acting as a sponsor for a young person from Pakistan, Bangladesh or wherever else, that young person would also have to be 18 to enter the country—although, in my view, 21 might be a better age. Such a measure would make a big difference to many young women such as those whom I have helped. Many of them were brought over as a spouse, sometimes when they were as young as 15—their passports were often changed—after which they were unceremoniously

dumped by their husband and their in-laws. In such situations, I am left to pick up the pieces, along with the Home Office. By and large, almost every case involves some measure of domestic violence, so we can use the domestic violence concession. I appreciate that concession, which I think was a brilliant idea. It saves a lot of girls from unnecessary suffering.

All those measures represent tinkering around the edges. I appreciate what the Home Office has done so far, but I believe that the solution to all these problems would be for Asian parents to arrange marriages for their sons and daughters within the settled community. None the less, I hope that my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House will convey my gratitude and that of my female Asian constituents to the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration.

5.13 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer).

We have heard some tremendous contributions today. In particular, I should like to associate myself with the remarks made about the Royal Hospital Haslar by my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers). I served at the Royal Hospital Haslar, and in my opinion, its demise has been the final nail in the coffin of the Defence Medical Services. Ministers should be under no illusion: the Defence Medical Services are a central part of our defensive capability. They are in a truly dreadful state and the situation must be addressed as a matter of urgency. I have to tell the Minister that the new centre for defence medicine at Selly Oak has not been well received by those who serve in the Defence Medical Services. It was a sad day indeed when the Royal Hospital Haslar, with all its potential, finally met its end.

It was also a great pleasure to hear the remarks of the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock), some of which I agree with and some of which I disagree with. GM is an emerging technology, but the next one will undoubtedly be nanotechnology. Last week, I led a debate on that subject in Westminster Hall, but the response that I received from the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths), was less than comprehensive. I have written to him in the hope that he might revisit the *Hansard* record and address the points that I put to him.

In particular, we need to know where we are going with the debate on nanotechnology, because I fear the some of the mistakes that were made in relation to the GM public debate might be repeated in that context. I hope that we will have learned lessons from that—especially in relation to the wisdom, or lack of it, of having the public debate before the full evidence was available to present to the public. That is a topsy-turvy way of proceeding. I hope that we do not repeat that mistake when we deal publicly, as we must, with the next emerging technology—nanotechnology.

During the summer, we will see the last days of community health councils. That worries many hon. Members; some of us argued in Committee that it was folly. I pay tribute to the work of the community health councils that have served my constituents for more than a quarter of a century. I feel strongly that CHCs represented a good foundation on which to build, and I fear that after their demise our constituents will suffer from a lack of representation at that level. They have been valuable to me personally as a constituency MP in advising me of the feelings of people locally on health issues; they will be sorely missed.

We have not covered health greatly in this summer Adjournment debate; that is strange, given that health is probably the No. 1 priority of most of our constituents—certainly, my mailbag suggests that that is the case. I pay tribute to the Government for being able to spend historically large sums of money on health. I equally pay tribute to their predecessor for providing the economy necessary to achieve that spend. We should never fool ourselves that we can get health care on the cheap. Spending is relatively easy: it should not be considered a proxy for achieving the good health care that we all want for our constituents. The tricky bit is achieving the health outcomes that Britons have the right to expect. In that context, it is disingenuous to talk euphemistically of investment when we really mean spending. Words mean what words say, and it is important, in the context of health, to talk of spending, not to assume that spending equals an investment that will produce a return.

Spending on health services increased in real terms by 22 per cent. at the turn of the century, but hospital activity went up by just 1.6 per cent. Indeed, by their own deeply flawed star rating measures, the Government are failing, despite their largesse. Only this week, we heard that the number of zero star rated trusts has increased and that the performance of ambulance services has gone down. Those statistics come with a health warning, because one cannot realistically expect a 22 per cent. rise in spend to produce a straight-line proportionate increase in activity of anything like 22 per cent., let alone a 22 per cent. increase in health outcomes: the marginal utility is manifestly much less. I suggest, however, that it should be significantly greater than 1.6 per cent.

It is our duty to ask what has gone wrong. Part of the answer clearly lies in public sector inflation running at 5.3 per cent. There is a whole raft of reasons for that, including salary costs, national insurance, pensions and the use of expensive agency staff. Health service inflation outstrips just about every other form of inflation. Despite rationing by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, which has contained costs to some extent, the cost of drugs and medical devices is set to rocket.

Less obvious to outsiders would be the fact that many people are in the wrong jobs—non-productive jobs or jobs where the product is obscure. When I was in the Royal Navy, we reached the tipping point at which the number of admirals exceeded the number of ships afloat. It seems that we have reached that point in the NHS, with the number of bureaucrats exceeding the number of beds. That is nothing to be proud of. Allied with that is an incomprehensible budgetary framework in which health care managers are encouraged to spend in a short-term way—to adopt a "spend now or lose it" mentality. That has spawned a great range of jobs with no obvious purpose, as *The Sunday Times* rather unkindly highlighted at the weekend when it referred to what it described as rubbish jobs being thrown at a perceived public need, with little thought about what they would achieve in terms of outcomes.

[Dr. Andrew Murrison]

So it is that between 1997 and 2002 the number of doctors and nurses went up by 15 per cent., but the number of administrators soared by 46 per cent. Many of those managerial jobs do good things—there is no denying that—but surely that deployment of our 22 per cent. uplift in resources at the turn of the century would have been better spent on health care staff who are directly involved in a hands-on way with patients. My Select Committee found that tens of million of pounds had been lost to the system—we had no idea where tens of millions of pounds had gone under the NHS cancer plan. Nobody appears to have accounted for it let alone had any idea about what positive outcomes it had produced. That is hopeless.

Last week, I asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the data on which he was relying for his comparison by 2005 of EU spend and UK spend on health care were weighted or unweighted, projected or static, or whether they were based on the Office for National Statistics' newly computed data, which involve heath care spend by a raft of organisations outwith the NHS—charities, churches, nursing homes and so on. He addressed the first point honestly and said that it was weighted. On the other two, he was obscure, so we have to make our own conclusions on that.

Government spending on health care and education centrally seems to sit uneasily with the deficits that we see locally in our schools and hospitals. That is a great concern in my area, where the strategic health authority has a huge deficit—almost insurmountable, I would suggest—which it is being told to get on with sorting out itself, with little assistance, it seems, from the centre. How much worse will that get when local, apparently accountable and democratic governing bodies sit and are responsible for these budgets? I suspect that Ministers will rusticate responsibility even more.

It is glib and dishonest to say that the increase in spending must go hand in hand with reform without a clear vision of what that reform means. Somewhere along the way, the Government have lost the plot, and our constituents' health expectations are the poorer for it.

5.22 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): The principal topic with which I am going to deal this afternoon—I shall speak briefly, in case you have the chance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to fit in two other speakers—is a riveting one: multi-agency working. Some Members will be surprised to hear me use such an expression, because even the expression "new Labour" has yet to pass my lips. To speak in the language of it might therefore seem strange.

Multi-agency working, however, is basically quite a good idea. It says that what we must do is get different people—social services, local borough councils, the police service, the probation service and everyone else who might have some share of a problem—to work together rather than carve it up so that each does their different thing and nothing much joins together. My experience, however, is that we have a long way to go. I want the Government to consider seriously whether, when it is clear that multiple agencies need to be involved in a problem, we should try to get somebody to take lead responsibility for it.

Let me give an example from my constituency. I was approached by two very worried parents, both aged over 70 and frail in health, the mother suffering from cancer. They were the parents of someone whom I will call Joe Bloggs. Joe was in prison and about to come out. He had been given a two-and-a-half year sentence but was being let out on licence after a year and a half. He had been a heroin addict and was clean. I discovered that he was going to come out a week before he did so because his parents simply did not know to whom to turn. As Members of Parliament, we can get access to a lot of people whom others cannot normally get hold of, so when his parents came to see me, I was able to speak to the governor of the prison, the chief probation officer, the head of social services, and someone at the housing department. I spent a week doing all that, but at the end of it all, this man was coming out of prison clean, but with no prospect at all of remaining so.

The man's parents were told that there were two possible arrangements for when he came out of prison. The first was that no one would meet him; the second was that they could meet him. However, they were very frail and upset, their grandchildren often stayed with them in their house, and there was no way that someone who needed that level of care and attention could be looked after at home. So, in the end, I agreed to do it. I got up at 5.45 am and went to the prison with the parents. I had made all the arrangements. The prison then told us that he would be released at 9 am. At 10.30 am, he finally emerged, so we had already lost an hour and a half out of the day in which we could have been trying to solve his problem.

I then took him to his home, where his parents helped him in various ways. I wanted the bond between him and his parents to be established before I moved him on, because he would otherwise have thought that they did not care. He also needed to know, however, that it was impossible for his parents to look after him. He understood that, and we left his home and went to the probation office. The probation office is meant to be the lead agency for someone on licence, but the probation officer in charge of the case was a probationer himself, so it went to another probation officer.

Three days before the man came out of prison, I had to tell the probation office that this prisoner had cerebral palsy. "Oops!", they said, "Sorry, we didn't know that he was disabled. That's a different category." I thought that we might now be able to get some help. The ex-prisoner was determined to get the help that people who have been drug addicts need. He was also determined not to come back to Hemel Hempstead, where all his old contacts were. After four hours in the probation office, I had to go off and see another constituent for a couple of hours—someone who was dying—and when I got back on the case, I found that the first thing that they had done when I left was to phone his frail, elderly parents to say, "Come and get him." His parents went to get him from the probation office—luckily they were able to drive there—and they brought him away. Finally, I saw him again that evening established in a house in which it was absolutely clear that he would be dragged back into his drug habit in no time at all.

The probation office did not even know the phone number of social services. The local borough council housing department had had a dispute with the man about the rent from the last time that he had lived there, and even though his parents had cancelled his tenancy, it had not been cancelled. The whole business was surrounded by utter incompetence. There was nobody to say, "He's my case. I'll try to see this through." Unless we have a lead agent for this sort of case, the only thing that people like this will be able to do is to go back on the street and start robbing. This guy was a pusher, and very well known in the area, but he wanted to get off the drugs. But in the end, the whole system, with dozens of people being paid very high salaries, could make absolutely nothing happen. I ask the House to consider whether we are ever going to get things right unless we can appoint a lead agent in these cases to take responsibility for people like that.

5.29 pm

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): I shall try to be brief and concise in the one minute that I have in which to speak.

I should like to concentrate on two issues that will be of concern to many of my constituents over the summer recess. One is the mis-selling of travel insurance. An awful lot of people going on holiday this summer will have been the subject of mis-selling. They will come back from their holidays to find that they do not have proper insurance because a number of the major travel agencies will have hoodwinked them into accepting their own insurance without having established pre-existing conditions; that will invalidate their cover. This problem should be covered when the Government consider extending regulation of the insurance industry.

When we return in September, we will be only a few weeks away from the introduction of the new pension credit system. That subject was raised by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson). It will be in the spotlight. A large number of pensioners live below the Government's poverty line: 22 per cent. of pensioners—2 million in total—still live in poverty. Some £2 billion of pension benefits are unclaimed, and 32 per cent. of pensioners who are eligible do not claim the minimum income guarantee; that includes 11,000 pensioners in my constituency, and some 87,000 pensioners in Scotland.

I fear that what will happen when the pension credit comes in will be similar to what happened with the workings of the child tax credit system earlier this year. Two million callers were abandoned when they phoned the helpline. I shall not repeat the arguments that have been put, but the Government have an opportunity to establish a proper infrastructure to deal with this scheme. We have an ageing population, and we must help people who are going into retirement. Frustration has been felt on both sides of the House, because the Government have been too timid and have not properly addressed some of the problems that pensioners will face in the near future, especially with the introduction of the pension credit.

There are a number of issues that we have to deal with, but there is no time to mention them all. I believe that the Government would be well advised to deal with the problem of the mis-selling of travel insurance and the problems that will arise with the introduction of the pension credit.

5.31 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): It is a great pleasure to respond to the debate on behalf of the Opposition. It has been an incredibly wide-ranging debate—so wide-ranging that I should refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests just in case. We have covered the field, on subjects such as Iraq, the pension credit, telecommunications, the House of Lords, Cyprus, Mount Vernon hospital, golf courses, air transport and broadband.

The summer Adjournment debate is important. We can write to Ministers during the recess, but this is the last opportunity to get points on record. It is regrettable that a number of Members have not been able to speak. I suggest to the Deputy Leader of the House that these Adjournment debates should have a time limit on speeches but let the debate run on, because it would not be too painful if we went on for a further half an hour and all missed our trains to our constituencies. At least everyone would have a chance to speak.

I make a plea to the Deputy Leader of the House to pass on to the relevant Ministers the points raised by hon. Members for an answer. I spoke in one of these debates about a social services issue. I waited patiently in my constituency for an answer, but answer came there none. I had to get in touch with the Department myself.

I will not add to the list of issues that have been raised, but I want to make the point that we have not had a chance to discuss in the House the desperate situation of the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund. Payments to a charity in my constituency have been suspended, and I suspect that the same applies to many charities in other constituencies. I hope that the Government will keep their eye on that issue.

We heard excellent contributions, starting with the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon). She spoke about road accidents and sleep disorders. Those subjects are not often raised in the House, so it was good to put those points on the record. I respect her proud and consistent record on Iraq. I do not agree with her, but the questions that she asked about the source that the United Kingdom Government used for making the statement about uranium sourced from Niger will not go away. The many contributions on Iraq point to the fact that further debates will be not only welcome, but essential.

My hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) made a wise, comprehensive and passionate speech about Tibet, which is also topical, given the Prime Minister's forthcoming tour. As my hon. Friend said, real negotiations between the Chinese and the Tibetan Government in exile are needed. He made the powerful point that we should not reward violent groups: we should reward non-violence. The Dalai Lama has been the apogee of non-violence.

The hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall) made a wide-ranging speech. He talked about transport in Cheshire and Cheshire county council. He made a particular point about special schools. He obviously knows what he is talking about, having worked in that field. He made a powerful point. Those of us who have

[Mr. David Cameron]

residential special schools in our constituencies value them, but they are often not valued by the county council. I am not sure that that is political; I think it is to do with the trend towards inclusion in education in all circumstances. I hope that the hon. Gentleman succeeds in his campaign. He mentioned Halton hospital, and I agree that in the national health service small is often beautiful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) made what I hope he will not mind my describing as a familiar speech. It was no less powerful for that. He has been vigorous in defending the royal hospital Haslar, which, as he said, is the only defence hospital left in the United Kingdom. He spoke of the difficulties of retaining staff, and pointed out that it was not just a question of pay. It was a question of institutions that people care about, and want to work in. He referred to "super-hospitals", as did my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson). We must ask ourselves whether staff value working in those as much as they value working in smaller institutions that they know and love.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport also mentioned the Daedalus site for asylum seekers at Lee-on-the-Solent. Like others today, he demonstrated the power of pinning Ministers down with parliamentary questions. I agree with him that while any asylum and immigration system will have its disadvantages, one advantage of a quota system with more offshore processing is that it would rid us of the problem of where to site asylum centres.

The hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) was one of many speakers who had apparently been unable to catch Mr. Speaker's eye during debates on Iraq. Many of us were in the same position, yet we were deluged with letters, advice and e-mails from constituents. We wanted to show that we had listened before reaching our own judgments. I supported the hon. Lady's judgment: she was sceptical but supportive, deploring war but recognising that it was sometimes essential, praising the United Nations route but recognising that the French veto made the war inevitable. I thought her speech powerful. She lost me when she moved on to the European constitution and not having a referendum, but found me again when she dealt with regional government. Two out of three is not bad.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood talked about the cancer and burns unit at Mount Vernon hospital in Northwood. He has been a doughty fighter for that, as well as for Harefield hospital. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport, he pointed out that institutions matter as well as bricks and mortar. It is dreadful when "progress" means the closing of much-loved hospitals.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) spoke about Iraq, and about pensioners. I think we all support what he said about Iraq—"They want their country back"—and the sooner we can deliver that, the better it will be for stability in the region. On the pension credit, he asked for no repeat of the debacle over tax credits. I am sure that we all say, "Hear, hear" to that.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), in what sounded like a winding up of the early part of the debate, rightly said that all speeches about Iraq were very sincere. He told us his own tale about House of Lords reform, describing the long trail of questions that he had asked the Prime Minister, which had led him to conclude that the Prime Minister does not always answer the question. Even after only two and a half years in this place, I must say that my reaction was "Wow!" The hon. Gentleman is sincere about the House of Lords, however. He said that the larger number had voted for the elected options, which is true if we assume that 332 Members voted for them. I hope that he, and the rest of us, will be persistent, and that the Government will try to find a proper solution.

The hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis) made a knowledgeable speech about Cyprus. He reminded us of the events that took place 29 years ago, and of the slow progress that has been made towards a settlement. He took a slightly stronger line against Turkey than some of us would want to—many of us feel that Turkey wants to be a European democracy rather than an Islamic state, and that we should be more welcoming—but I respect what he said about Cyprus and the importance of a settlement there.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) produced a rich menu of issues, including the declaration of interests that parish councillors have had to sign. Many Members will have received representations about that. I hope that the Government will listen to those who say that they should try to lighten parish councillors' load and celebrate what they do.

Like others, my hon. Friend mentioned schools funding. He said that 52 schools in his constituency were in deficit. I do not think we have heard the last of that. It is a pity that the Government are not going to relent, but we hope that things will be better in future years. He also asked about the report on the international year of the mountain, 2002, which we are awaiting. I hope that the Deputy Leader of the House will give us a commitment on that.

Appropriately enough on the first day of the Open, the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) spoke about golf courses and the great planning pressures in the south-east and Essex. I am sure that some of us thought how nice it would be to be at the Open, rather than here, and I gather that Justin Rose is doing very well. Those of us with seats in the south-east absolutely understand the hon. Gentleman's point.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) made a very controversial remark when he said that his is the most beautiful constituency in the country. I was going to disagree, as the Cotswolds and west Oxfordshire are far more beautiful, but then I remembered that I am going on holiday to Jura, which I believe is in his constituency. Perhaps we can meet at the top of a pap and discuss this. He also spoke about transport and regional air services, which are desperately needed. I hope that he will be listened to. All of us with rural constituencies will agree with his point about broadband, and will want some of the non-BT, satellite options to be pursued. I hope that the Government listen to that point as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), who is a doughty fighter for his constituency, raised a range of issues to do with crime. I picked up on the point about his secondary schools having a £400,000 shortfall. That is a huge deficit and I ask the Government to take on this issue.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) made a very knowledgeable speech about genetically modified crops and the danger of super-weeds. I listened to her with great interest—indeed, the great debate on GM has even reached "The Archers". When the House returns, we really must address her point about having a debate on this issue in government time.

The hon. Member for Tooting (Tom Cox) made a very knowledgeable speech about Pakistan. He mentioned what a good friend to this country President Musharraf has been and that we must press for Pakistan's re-entry into the Commonwealth. I am sure that that message was received by Government Front Benchers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) spoke about bad odours in south Essex—I hope that I heard him right—and the problems with Pitsea tip. He mentioned buck-passing, and as we all know from our constituency experience in dealing with the Environment Agency, one can often be passed from pillar to post. I hope that the Government will listen to that point.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) discussed greyhound racing and made the important point that a welfare fund for dogs should perhaps be established. I am slightly more sceptical about the concept of licensing and registration for all puppies. If we go back to having dog and cat licences, I wonder where it will end. Soon, we will be licensing hamsters. However, his was a well-thought-through speech on an important subject.

The hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) is an expert on immigration rules and, particularly for those of us who do not have large immigrant populations in our constituencies, it is always good to listen and learn from her. She discussed changing the age that one needs to reach before becoming a sponsor, and ensuring that a sponsor has to be a citizen. Those were positive and constructive contributions to this important subject, and I hope that the Deputy Leader of the House will pass them on to the Home Office, to see whether they can be looked at in detail.

The hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter)—the man who asked the Prime Minister whether he had a philosophy—now seems to have adopted that philosophy. He referred to multi-agency working, and it is only a matter of time before he starts talking about roll-out, joined-up government and pilots. If he is not careful, he will start talking about "imagineering". He clearly needs a holiday to recover his old Labour credentials, but he makes an important point. On leaving prison, people can fall between the gaps. In the worst cases involving heroin addicts, after drying out in prison, their first fix on coming out is often their last. They are not picked up by the probation service or the various agencies. That is a powerful point.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) was cut off rather cruelly, but his point about the mis-selling of travel insurance was well made and certainly needs to be looked at.

I end with my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison), who spoke about his time at the Royal Hospital Haslar, and about nanotechnology. He is probably one of few in this House who actually understands what nanotechnology is, rather than believing, as Prince Charles does, that it is grey goo. My hon. Friend paid tribute to community health councils and the work that they have done, and I am sure that Members on both sides of the House will pay tribute to their own CHCs, regardless of how they voted on that issue; I certainly pay tribute to mine. He posed one of the great questions that we face. An enormous amount of public money is being spent on public services such as the NHS, and the huge test for the Government—in a way, it is a huge experiment—is whether that will lead to more activity. His figures suggest that so far activity has remained relatively flat. The big test for this Government will be whether that giant tax-and-spend experiment will work. We shall have to wait and see.

On that note, I wish the House and its members of staff a happy recess, and I look forward to the reply of the Deputy Leader of the House.

5.44 pm

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Phil Woolas): I start by echoing the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) in saying what an excellent debate this has been. It has been wide ranging, with some 22 contributions from Back Benchers on both sides of the House. The range of subjects has been frankly mind-boggling. We have been to a golf course in the Brain valley that has more than 18 holes. I do not know what they propose to call the bar at that course. Having played 31 holes, I suppose one needs a drink. We have been to hospitals in various parts of the country, and we have been up mountains for the year of the mountain.

We have had foreign trips, surpassing even those that hon. Members will take in the next eight weeks. We have been to Tibet and Pakistan, stopping for a while in Iraq. We have been to Cyprus via Egypt, coming back to the more familiar territory of parish councils in Bedfordshire. I will come back to those later.

We have had bad odours in Essex. Out of context, that would look bad for the hon. Member for Castle Point (Mr. Spink), but we understand what he means. We have had fires at Yarl's Wood, abandoned greyhounds and a wide range of topics that I shall try to answer. In response to the hon. Member for Witney, I undertake to ensure that if I cannot answer any questions, we will write to the relevant Secretaries of State. I can inform the House that thanks to the excellent work of the officials in the Office of the Leader of the House, I have been passed notes in answer to points made in the previous recess debate so that we can tie up some loose ends.

Reference has been made to extending these debates, as we now have the cut-off at 6 o'clock. Perhaps the House would like to consider that. If these debates were open-ended, I suspect that we would be here until 8 September, given the ability of some hon. Members to keep going. This debate is important and obviously we take these matters seriously.

[Mr. Phil Woolas]

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) raised two diverse issue, sleeping disorders and road safety, and her well-known and passionately held views on Iraq. The Government have every intention of maintaining the momentum of the current publicity campaign to promote awareness of driver sleepiness. The campaign started in August 2000 and we are spending just over £1 million annually on it. We continue to look at ways in which we can get the message across. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that treatment available on the NHS of continuous positive airway pressure is often effective in eliminating the disorder. It is important that that is available. I shall come back to the subject of Iraq because several hon. Members mentioned it.

The hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) raised the issue of Tibet and I am sure that he has support on both sides of the House, particularly with regard to the cases he raised; such as the horrific execution of Lobsang Dhondup in Tibet. The Government continually raise the issue of human rights in Tibet with the Chinese Government, most recently on 25 June. As the hon. Gentleman said, the Prime Minister will be visiting Japan. *[Interruption.]* I apologise. The Prime Minister is going to so many places it is difficult to keep up. He is going to China to raise the issue. He is going to Japan as well, but he will not be raising the issue of human rights in Tibet. Maybe he will; he works many wonders, our Prime Minister.

My hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall) spoke passionately about constituency concerns. First, he mentioned the proposed reduction of services at Hartford station—an important link to the mainline and London. I understand that the reason for the change is that that bit of the line is a pinch point, which causes congestion. Proposals are being examined to establish whether the higher performance trains now available—with better acceleration and better braking—will make possible an increased number of calls at the station.

Secondly, my hon. Friend mentioned Cloughwood school in his constituency. He has close personal knowledge of, and strongly supports, the school, and the school bus services are obviously important. Those are matters for the Cheshire county council, and my hon. Friend is right to raise them in the debate.

Thirdly, my hon. Friend referred to the Halton hospital. I understand that the strategic health authority supports my hon. Friend's views, and I know that he will campaign vigorously on that matter. I will certainly draw his views to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

As he does on so many occasions, the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) raised the issue of the medical services in the armed forces. I believe that he is a former member of the Royal Air Force and he obviously holds strong views on that matter. He is familiar with the difficulty of reconfiguring the medical defence services. I will certainly chase up the points that he made, particularly in respect of his correspondence with the Minister, and I shall again draw his point of view to the Secretary of State's attention.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the Daedalus site, and I understand that an announcement will shortly be made. The responsible Home Office Minister visited the site on 15 May this year, following the announcement in February, and I understand that consideration is currently being given to it. We await an announcement on that important matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) talked about Iraq and referendums. If it was two out of three for the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron), it must be one out of three for me on this occasion—no, in the light of her views on Iraq, it is two out of three in reality. That shows that we do not always oppose what the Opposition say, simply because the Opposition say it.

I strongly agree with my hon. Friend's views on the European Union constitution. The Government's position is well known—that the arguments in favour of a referendum on that matter are bogus. The EU Convention is the bringing together of treaties that have been determined in the past. It is interesting to read the views expressed in the press—particularly the pro-federalist press—on the continent, and discover how strongly the constitution is opposed because it is not seen as a federalist document. It is also notable how much the British Government are praised for the skilful negotiation of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

I have to part company with my hon. Friend on the issue of a referendum for a north-west regional assembly. The Government consulted on the matter and interests were expressed, but we will campaign for a yes vote in the referendum. I do not accept the argument that the regional assembly is a duplication and another tier of bureaucracy. I regard it as another tier of democracy, which devolves bureaucracy from Whitehall closer to the regions. The helpline advice to a constituent in Argyll and Bute to travel 140 miles to the local tax office is a strong argument for regional devolution. The distances in our regions may not be that great, but government closer to the people is better government. I hope that the referendum will result in a positive outcome. My hon. Friend holds strong views on that and divisions will exist within parties and across party lines.

The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) raised some important points about Mount Vernon and Harefield hospitals, and I know that Members from neighbouring constituencies have also raised those serious issues. There are real concerns about them, but the difficulty that the health authorities have is balancing any damage that change inevitably causes with the future investment in, and development of, services at the other sites involved. The hon. Gentleman made his points clinically, if I may put it like that, and I will ensure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is made aware of those views.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) raised several issues. He talked about his views on Iraq, and I am sure that all hon. Members will respect them. His constituents will, I am sure, learn of his contribution today and will also respect him for those strongly held views, which I happen to share. However, I agree with the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) that Members on all sides of that argument hold their views sincerely.

My hon. Friend mentioned the situation of pensioners, and he also referred to the introduction in October of the pension credit. The Government's record on increasing the money paid to pensioners—including the minimum income guarantee and the pension credit, when it is introduced—is greatly welcomed by all pensioners. Hon. Members are right to raise concerns about implementation of the system, and whether it will be simple enough for pensioners to understand, but the Government have listened carefully to those points to ensure a smooth implementation of what will prove to be a step change in provision for pensioners.

My hon. Friend raised other issues. He is a former telecoms engineer and has much knowledge of the issues relating to the telecoms industry. I have a follow-up document in front of me from the previous time my hon. Friend raised those issues, and I shall draw them to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and ensure that my hon. Friend gets an answer. He also mentioned shipbuilding and the importance to his constituents of the aircraft carrier contract, and Ministers from the Ministry of Defence are well aware of his views on that. He also mentioned the Communications Bill, which I have covered.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall was perhaps called a little earlier than he had hoped, but he made a wide-ranging contribution. He is right to say that the House of Commons could not come to a consensus on the issue of the House of Lords. While all hon. Members can say what the House was against, the Leader of the House and the Government have to determine what the House voted for. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join us in the effort to abolish the remaining hereditary peers, which is an improvement that we outlined in our manifesto. We want to introduce more independent appointments in the House of Lords to make it more democratic and representative, and I hope that he will support that as progress. It may not go as far as he would like to go, but it is in the right direction.

My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis) raised the issue of Cyprus. He is aware of the Government's policy on the matter and I know that he supports it. I thank him for his work on that issue. The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) raised the issue of parish councils and the code of conduct and I will take his points up with the Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We have seen strong work from parish councils and we support them. On the point about the year of the mountain, I have a response from the Government and I will ensure that it is transmitted to the hon. Gentleman.

Several other hon. Members raised many other issues and I will ensure that they receive responses to the points that they made and the questions that they asked. It has been a wide-ranging and interesting debate. The summer Adjournment comes at a time when our economy is stronger than it has ever been, with record low levels of unemployment, inflation and interest. The Government are in strong heart and they are moving forward with their investment and reform agenda. As Members deliberate over the shorter summer break this year, they will realise that this bumpy month was, in fact, a good time for the Government.

It being Six o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

PETITIONS

School Funding

6 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I wish to present a petition on behalf of schools throughout Somerset that are desperately concerned about not only the funding crisis this year, but the chronic under-funding of Somerset schools. I entirely agree with its sentiments.

The petition has been signed by about 1,300 people and has been collected from 59 different schools in my constituency and across Somerset. It states:

To the House of Commons, The petition of Anne Stephens, on behalf of the schools of Somerset, Declares that the funds allocated do not meet the needs of schools.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons consider a fairer settlement for Somerset children.

And the Petitioners remain etc.

It is signed by Anne Stephens, the head teacher of Bruton primary school.

To lie upon the Table.

Air Quality (South Essex)

6.1 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I raised the issue of air quality in south Essex in the 1990s when I was first a Member of Parliament and I raised it again in the first month that I returned to the House in 2001, yet still no proper action has been taken to provide proper monitoring of the problem in south Essex, hence the nightmare of the past five months in my constituency and surrounding areas. People have suffered health and quality-of-life problems because proper action has not been taken. I congratulate the *Yellow Advertiser* and my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron) on their campaign. I have been pleased to be able to join them in fighting on this issue.

The *Yellow Advertiser* raised a petition that states:

To the Honourable Commons of the United Kingdom, Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of the Yellow Advertiser sheweth.

That there is great anger and fear in South Essex about the pungent smells emanating from Pitsea Tip and blighting our communities, and residents and visitors wish to register their protest against those smells which have also caused serious health concerns and destroyed whole communities' quality of life.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House shall urge the Government to take action, through the Environment Agency, to curb the smells, to set up proper monitoring, to establish contingency plans to deal with any further smells and therefore to protect our communities.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Community Pharmacies

6.2 pm

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): In common with many other right hon. Members and hon. Members, I have been petitioned by pharmacists and the customers of community pharmacies with a generic petition entitled "Save our pharmacy services".

The petition states:

The petition of the residents of Reading

Declares that the proposals to allow unrestricted opening of pharmacies able to dispense NHS prescriptions would undermine the excellent service currently provided by community pharmacists.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons reject proposals to allow unrestricted opening of pharmacies able to dispense NHS prescriptions.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

I welcome the Government's statement today that they do not believe that this is the time to move to a fully deregulated system. They therefore intend to move cautiously in the direction recommended by the Office of Fair Trending. I believe that my petitioners would recommend that the Government reject the OFT recommendations entirely.

To lie upon the Table.

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

6.4 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I am very grateful to Mr. Speaker for giving me the opportunity to raise the important question of the treatment and care of people who suffer from rheumatoid arthritis. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), is fairly new to his post and I certainly do not expect him to be an expert on this subject. This debate is not an opportunity for me and my colleagues to attack the Government's health policy. Given that all Governments must have priorities, I ask him to find out whether he can nudge rheumatoid arthritis up the list because it is a dreadful disease from which many people suffer.

Rheumatoid arthritis is a common auto-immune disease that is painful, disabling and progressive. It affects people of all ages including young children and teenagers—I do not think that that is widely understood. It has a mortality rate similar to that of coronary heart disease, diabetes, Hodgkin's disease and stroke, yet unfortunately, by comparison, its treatment is comparatively poorly resourced. The lack of appropriate funding and resources leads to a lack of adequate disease management, which in turn impacts adversely on patients' quality of life. The loss of earnings suffered when people have to stop work because of rheumatoid arthritis has a detrimental financial impact on patients, their families and the wider community.

Some 42 per cent. of rheumatoid arthritis patients are registered disabled within three years while 80 per cent. become moderately to severely disabled within 20 years of their diagnosis. There were 1.9 million consultations with general practitioners for inflammatory arthritis in 2000, and in 1999–2000, 9.4 million working days were lost in the United Kingdom because of rheumatoid arthritis, which represents £833 million of lost production.

I pay tribute to Mrs. Ailsa Bosworth, who is the president and founder of the National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society—NRAS. There is no doubt that without her determination, rheumatoid arthritis would not have achieved such prominence among the general public. I hope that the Government will respond to that accordingly.

My fellow officers of the all-party group on rheumatoid arthritis and I had the opportunity to visit Guy's hospital and meet Dr. Kirkham and Professor Panayi, who have given great service to people who suffer from rheumatoid arthritis. We saw the hospital's excellent facilities from which rheumatoid arthritis sufferers could benefit. We also had the opportunity to visit Queen Mary's hospital in Sidcup, where we met Dr. Banerjee. He is a wonderful doctor who has given great care to his patients, but unfortunately for them, the hospital's facilities are in no way comparable to those at Guy's.

The newly formed all-party group on rheumatoid arthritis, of which I am chairman, has worked closely with the NRAS since last October, with the specific aim

of bringing the needs of rheumatoid arthritis patients and the resources required for rheumatology, as a specialist health area, to the Government's attention. Addressing the issues that relate directly to rheumatoid arthritis would benefit the wider patient community who suffer from osteoarthritis and other forms of arthritis, as well as people with musculo-skeletal conditions who are also treated by consultant rheumatologists and multidisciplinary teams that operate in the rheumatology field. I am pleased to say that a summary of the issues will be the subject of a NRAS consensus report that will be published at the end of the month. It will include contributions from patients, leading rheumatologists, primary care physicians and specialist rheumatology nurses from the Royal College of Nursing rheumatology nursing forum.

I ask the Government to do whatever they can to give access to quality treatment. Early diagnosis and treatment is essential to minimise disease progression, joint damage and pain. The NRAS patient survey that was conducted earlier this year showed that it is unfortunately not uncommon for a patient to wait longer than a year to be referred into secondary care to see a specialist—of course, that is not acceptable. Early referral to a multidisciplinary team involving specialist nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and podiatrists is recommended for best care. There are simply not enough of those teams. The recommended provision for consultant rheumatologists is one per 85,000 people. Sadly, that is not met anywhere in the United Kingdom. The latest figures suggest that the speciality is more than 40 per cent. under strength, with an average of one consultant rheumatologist for every 150,000 people.

I am also concerned about professional training and standards of care generally. Training in musculo-skeletal disease does not have sufficient priority in primary and secondary care. Current training is inadequate. There are also barriers to adequate rheumatoid arthritis services. The NHS has not paid enough attention to that over the decades. That is not in any sense a jibe at the Government. No Government have given it sufficient priority. The distortion of care in national priorities has to be addressed. It is no longer acceptable that guidelines have been produced for optimal care in Scotland and that a strategy for arthritis in Wales is being developed by the Welsh Assembly, but nothing has been developed in England. No doubt the Minister will tell me that that is on the agenda.

There is no national service framework for rheumatoid arthritis, other forms of arthritis and musculo-skeletal conditions. There is only a brief mention of the disease in the new GP contract. There is no drive that I am aware of—again, the Minister may tell me otherwise—to improve the quality of services in general. Too few primary care organisations or health authorities have the background to commission relevant services.

In March 2002, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence approved use of anti-TNF therapy for people with severe rheumatoid arthritis on whom existing treatments had failed. Since the debate was publicised, any number of organisations and interested parties have advised me on what I should raise, but I cannot cover all the issues in 15 minutes. More than 12 months on from NICE approving its use, the key finding is that postcode prescribing of anti-TNF therapy remains a significant problem in the UK.

More than a third of the rheumatologists in the survey reported that they are still unable to prescribe anti-TNF therapy to every patient they identify in accordance with NICE guidance. In at least one area, the local primary care trust has decided not to commission any anti-TNF therapy on the ground of a major shortfall in cash. In the majority of cases in which rheumatologists could not prescribe anti-TNF therapy to all the patients they identified, insufficient funding was reported as the main barrier. That is obviously worrying. The survey took place between February and May 2003. Of 184 UK consultant rheumatologists surveyed, 152 participated, which is a pretty good response, representing 82.6 per cent. of respondents, the majority of whom were from England and Wales.

I have three questions for the Minister. If he does not have time to reply, perhaps he could write to me. Does he agree that the loss of quality of life to rheumatoid arthritis patients, the burden of care put on families, which leads to a high level of separation and divorce, the loss of £833 million-worth of production to employers, the loss of revenue to the Government and the cost of benefits paid to disabled rheumatoid arthritis patients, is a serious issue and must be addressed?

The main point is that I would like to know from the Government what importance and what priority they attach to treating inflammatory arthritis.

The second point is whether the Minister agrees that general practitioners, primary care trusts and special health authorities will put their resources foremost into meeting Government targets and priorities, and that unless rheumatoid arthritis and arthritis generally are made higher priorities by the Government, rheumatoid arthritis patients will miss out.

Finally, will the Minister welcome the work that is being done by patient groups and health professionals under the standards of care project that is currently under way, which is being co-ordinated and sponsored by the Arthritis and Musculo-skeletal Alliance? Perhaps the Minister might agree to an all-party meeting where we might have more time to go into greater depth on this important issue.

6.16 pm

Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): I shall be extremely brief. First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) on achieving such a quick success in securing this debate. The all-party group feels strongly about the devastating impact that rheumatoid arthritis has on the individuals concerned and their families, young and old alike.

At the heart of the debate, what surely is at issue is the way in which the National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidelines are being interpreted and implemented by primary care trusts. I heard that one PCT had decided not to allow TNF therapy; my heart sank. I quickly checked to make sure that it was not the PCT in my area. I was greatly relieved to speak to Dr. Patricia Youett, of Rugby PCT, who informed me that it adheres extremely carefully to the guidelines that NICE has issued. It believes that that is the only way forward in ensuring fairness and equity to all patients wishing to receive health services.

[Andy King]

It is wrong that arthritis does not feature in the priorities of certain PCTs. That must be put right. It is timely for the Minister to take action to ensure that clear direction is given to PCTs throughout the country to ensure that they give due consideration to the guidelines issued by NICE and, more importantly, act upon them. We must put postcode prescribing into the dustbin of history once and for all.

6.18 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) about the seriousness of rheumatoid arthritis. He spoke with passion and power about an important subject that needs its profile raising.

I pay tribute to rheumatologists throughout the country, and particularly at Guy's, which has a centre of excellence. I know that all rheumatologists are pretty good guys, but some of them do not have the facilities that are available at Guy's. We would like to see those facilities made available nationwide so that everyone can benefit from them. I speak as vice-chairman of the all-party group.

The serious problem that is the focus of the debate is postcode prescribing for rheumatoid arthritis. It was covered by the "You and Yours" programme on Radio 4 on 14 July. It highlighted that two thirds of severe sufferers do not get the treatment that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidelines say should be made available to them. That means that 18,000 to 30,000 people with a severely crippling disease that can lead to high levels of mortality are being denied the treatment that they so desperately need. I ask the Minister, who I know is a good man and is listening carefully, to raise the profile of this disease. It does not have the appeal of strokes, heart attacks and cancer, but it is important. Secondly, will the Minister ensure that everyone who would benefit from anti-TNF treatments, which NICE says it should be mandatory to provide, can take advantage of them?

6.20 pm

Dr. Stephen Ladyman: I congratulate the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) on winning this Adjournment debate and on taking up the chairmanship of the all-party group on rheumatoid arthritis. I very much welcome the creation of that group, and look forward to an early opportunity to meet its members. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Andy King) and the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) on being prepared to stay here today and participate in this debate. If their constituents are not familiar with the workings of the House, they may not realise that many of our colleagues started their summer holiday yesterday, and that we have given up a day of our recess to take part in this important debate.

This debate gives me an opportunity to state the Government's position on both rheumatoid arthritis and the work and guidance of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. I emphasise that when NICE has issued guidance, we expect that guidance to be implemented everywhere. It is not optional—it is compulsory. We will be doing what is necessary to ensure that it is implemented everywhere. We established NICE for specific reasons, and we intend to make sure that its judgments are followed.

I appreciate the efforts of the various voluntary agencies, including the excellent NRAS, which the hon. Member for Southend, West mentioned, many other voluntary organisations and the umbrella organisation, the Arthritis and Musculo-skeletal Alliance or ARMA. I welcome recent work highlighting disparities in treatment. I have seen the survey on the implementation of NICE guidance and the use of anti-TNF therapies. Frankly, it is disappointing that a number of primary care trusts still not have made those important drugs fully available, and we shall certainly follow that up.

Members in the Chamber, but perhaps not other people who do not follow this issue closely, will know that tumour necrosis factor alpha has been found to be a key molecule in the cause of rheumatoid arthritis. Over-production of that molecule is one of the causes of the inflammatory processes that damage cartilage and bone. Anti-TNF therapies and other drugs inhibit that process. Arthritis can and does, as the hon. Member for Southend, West said, affect people of all ages, from young children to older people, but prevalence generally increases with age. It is estimated that about 70 per cent. of 70-year-olds suffer from some form of arthritis, mostly osteoarthritis. Arthritis means "inflammation of the joints", and it is the chief cause of physical disability in the United Kingdom. It encompasses more than 200 diseases affecting joints, the surrounding tissues and other connective tissues. Those diseases and conditions include osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, juvenile rheumatoid arthritis and fibromyalgia.

We are aware that arthritis has a significant impact on health and community services. It affects the people who experience its painful symptoms and disability, their family members and care givers. It is extremely painful and involves serious loss of mobility in many cases. The severity and extent of the condition varies from individual to individual, but we are well aware of the costs to communities and society generally, which hon. Members have pointed out.

NICE was set up as a special health authority for England and Wales on 1 April 1999. It is part of the national health service, and its role is to provide guidance on best practice. That guidance covers individual health technologies, including medicines, medical devices, diagnostic techniques, procedures and clinical management. NICE was asked to appraise the use of infliximab, also known as Remicade, and etanercept, also known as Enbrel, in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis.

NICE issued its guidance in March 2002. It recommended the use of etanercept for the treatment of juvenile idiopathic arthritis—JIA—and etanercept and infliximab for adult rheumatoid arthritis. Consultant rheumatologists, or consultant paediatric rheumatologists in the case of JIA, should prescribe these drugs, in accordance with the guidelines set out by the British Society for Rheumatology or the British Paediatric Rheumatology Group.

Two registries have been set up by the BSR and the BPRG to monitor the dosage, effects and any side effects of these drugs. The NICE guidance recommends that doctors should send information to the appropriate registry regularly to help researchers to find out about the long-term effectiveness and side effects of treatment with both drugs.

The NHS is receiving the largest sustained increase in funding in its history. We expect that increase in funding to be used to implement NICE guidance. Given that increase in funding, there is no excuse for primary care trusts not to follow the guidance. There is a statutory obligation on PCTs to make the treatments that NICE recommends available to patients.

In December 2001, the Government announced that they would meet their commitment to ensuring that patients receive drugs and treatments recommended by NICE if that was deemed appropriate by their clinicians. Directions were issued obliging primary care trusts to provide appropriate funding for recommended treatments. There should not be any administrative or financial blocks preventing that. From 1 January 2002, the NHS has three months from the date of publication of each technology appraisal guidance to provide funding, so that clinical decisions made by doctors involving NICE-recommended treatments or drugs can be funded.

When treating patients, clinicians have to make an independent clinical judgement that takes due account of NICE's advice and the strength of evidence that lies behind it. They may depart from the advice if, in their view, the circumstances of the individual patient justify doing so. But they will be held accountable through clinical governance arrangements for their clinical decisions. To assist them in this task, all technology appraisal guidance for treatments and drugs initiated after October 2000 includes specific audit advice and measurable criteria to be used in local reviews. A similar approach is being adopted for clinical guidelines.

The Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection—CHAI—will be the main inspector of NHS services in future. It will carry out inspection against clear national standards to be specified by the Secretary of State, and we expect NICE guidance to be included in those standards. It is worth reminding the House that NICE is proving to be effective, and at a national level there is evidence of increased prescribing of NICE-approved drugs. Indeed, the ARMA evidence appears to support that, as almost two thirds of the rheumatologists surveyed reported no problems. The comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth indicate that, in his area, NICE recommendations are being followed.

Under the previous Government, postcode prescribing of expensive drugs like anti-TNF therapy for arthritis was widespread. Postcode prescribing is now rare and we need to make it even rarer. The manufacturers of the arthritis drugs that we are discussing estimate that around 9,000 patients already benefit from this therapy.

Although we do not get involved in the day-to-day management of the NHS at local level, we will respond if we become aware of a specific instance where NICE guidance is not being implemented in the prescribing of infliximab. We have had reports from Nottingham, for example and we are investigating the concerns that have been raised. Responsibility for commissioning decisions across Nottingham lies with Nottingham commissioning forum, which co-ordinates decisions between PCTs and is advised by the major NHS trusts in the area. The forum has discussed implementation of NICE guidance, including the use of anti-TNF drugs in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis on a number of occasions. The local strategic health authority and PCTs have undertaken to find out why problems have arisen.

The ARMA report mentioned that, in some areas, a lack of nursing support was a barrier to patients' receiving anti-TNF therapy. There is an ongoing comprehensive programme of national and local action to recruit and retain nurses, midwives and health visitors. The commitment to 20,000 extra nurses in the NHS by 2004 contained in the NHS plan was met ahead of target in 2001. There were almost 50,000 more qualified nurses working in the NHS in England in April 2003 than in September 1997. The latest forecast is that 80,000 more nurses, midwives and health visitors will be working in the national health service as a whole by 2008, which highlights the importance of continuing efforts both to recruit and retain staff. That should help to overcome the nursing problems identified by ARMA in its report.

Research will also be very important, but it is worth saying that the research effort is not confined to the United Kingdom Government. We sometimes receive requests for increases in research that seem to imply that that is the case or to forget that other countries are involved in research efforts. Furthermore, research is not always done by the Government; it is also done by voluntary organisations, charities and so on. The Arthritis Research Campaign, for example, aims to advance the understanding, prevention and treatment of arthritis and related conditions. It is the fourth largest medical research charity in the United Kingdom, with an annual income of £26 million. I should perhaps admit at this point that it employed me for six years.

The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which also employed me for six years. The MRC is an independent body that receives its grant in aid from the Office of Science and Technology. The Department of Health funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the NHS. The MRC spent approximately £4.2 million on arthritis research in 2001–02. That figure includes work on the causes and treatment of arthritis, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and inflammation. It also includes work on musculoskeletal function, such as ankylosing spondylitis, on connective tissue disorders, such as Sjogrens syndrome and lupus, and on pain. Work being carried out at the MRC National Institute for Medical Research may contribute to the development of new drugs to treat rheumatoid arthritis and other inflammatory diseases.

The Department of Health has funded several research projects on rheumatoid arthritis via its national health service research and development programmes. They include a randomised controlled trial of different knee prostheses at the university of Dundee that is due for completion in 2010 and "Are topical or oral Ibuprofen equally effective for the treatment of chronic

[Dr. Stephen Ladyman]

knee pain in older people?", a study that is due to end in December 2005. The Department also provides NHS support funding for research commissioned by the research councils and charities that takes place in the NHS. Details of Department of Health-funded research and other projects that are completed and under way in the NHS can be found on the national research register.

Priorities for health and social care are set out in "Improvement, Expansion and Reform", the priorities and planning framework for 2003 to 2006. Although arthritis is not identified specifically, people with the condition stand to benefit from the improvement in access to specialist care for patients suffering from any form of orthopaedic condition. I have heard what hon. Members have said about the possible need for arthritis to be specifically recognised and I certainly undertake to reflect on that advice.

Maximum waiting times have fallen over the past few years and will continue to do so. By the end of 2005, the maximum waiting time for a first out-patient appointment with a consultant will fall to three months and the maximum wait for in-patient treatment will fall to six months. That is important for patients requiring anti-TNF therapy as the drugs have to be prescribed by a consultant. Also, the older people's national service framework set standards that will improve treatment and care for a range of older people, including those with arthritis.

It is important for me to say that primary care trusts have responsibility for ensuring that local issues are carefully considered in their plans, but I stress once again that NICE guidance has to be followed. I shall certainly ensure that they are aware of their obligation in that regard.

On any issues that I have not had time to deal with, I shall write to the hon. Members who have taken part in this debate. I give the House this assurance: the Government take arthritis and rheumatism extremely seriously and we will be doing everything that we can to ensure that there is no postcode prescribing, that treatments are available everywhere and that care is to the highest possible standard—

The motion having been made after Six o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-six minutes to Seven o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 15 July 2003

[MR. EDWARD O'HARA *in the Chair*]

Zimbabwe

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Paul Clark.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for making time for this important debate. This is the 13th time that Zimbabwe has been debated in this Chamber during this Session, which is a testament not just to the importance that we attach to Zimbabwe, but, alas, to our impotence to do anything about that country.

I shall begin with some personal reminiscences. In April 2002, I went to Zimbabwe unobtrusively as a tourist. In the company of the redoubtable Peta Thornycroft of the *The Daily Telegraph,* I decided to see at first hand what Robert Mugabe's policy of land reform actually entails. Peta took me to the Mazowe region just north of Harare to a 5,000 acre farm that had been started in 1936 by Tom Bayley, who was in his 90th year when I met him. When I went to see the Bayley family, they had been under siege for two years and had suffered about as much as the human spirit can endure. The war veterans, as they call themselves, were camped on the Bayleys' land and were burning lumber for fires, roasting and eating the seedcorn, constantly intimidating the Bayleys and making it impossible for them to bring in their crops. The cattle were infested with ticks and dying, and nothing had been sown for years.

The siege was intensifying because the war veterans, as they style themselves, were forbidding the older Bayleys from being visited by their son and daughter-in-law who lived in a separate house. They had been completely cut off for more than a month by a bunch of thugs wielding knives and pipes. Those people had the overt encouragement not only of the Mugabe regime, but of the police. A policeman was milling around and giggling. He was wholly complicit in the operation and refused to do anything to protect the Bayleys' basic right to property.

Thanks entirely to the bravery of the redoubtable Peta Thornycroft, we plucked up our courage and walked the 500 yd from the main Bayley farmstead to the little cottage where the old parents lived. It was very spooky because we had to run the gauntlet of the malodorous, tough-looking "war veterans". After a while, we got through the fence and into the cottage. The old Bayleys were thrilled to see us because they had not seen a friendly face for a month while they had been besieged. They sat us down at their kitchen table and told us what it was like. Tom Bayley said, "We are being tortured." He also said that he had been on the farm for 70 years and had come from Chelmsford in Essex aged 20; everyone had told him that he should go out to the empire, so he did. He said that if he did what the thugs wanted and walked out of the house, they would take everything. He then produced a tray of medals that he had earned for military service for this country during the second world war. He also produced a British passport. At that moment, I felt overcome with shame, embarrassment and pity. I wondered what I as an MP could do for that guy—a British citizen, a British subject. What could the House of Commons and this country do to protect the rights of a Briton who had fought for his country and who had a British passport? I thought how fallen, how changed, this country was that we could do two thirds of zilch to protect a man in such circumstances. He started crying, and it was very upsetting.

The only person who seemed to have a plan in those deeply sad circumstances was the redoubtable Peta Thornycroft, who marched out, confronted the ZANU-PF thugs and said to one, "If you were my son, I'd bend you over my knee and beat you." These correspondents from *The Daily Telegraph* are pretty tough. As I recall, the man replied, with a signal lack of logic, "If you were my mother, you would not be my mother." I did not quite follow his argument, but in any case we parted with expressions of a mutual lack of esteem.

I returned to London and this place and set about trying to get some Sinemet for the old lady, Mrs. Bayley, who had Parkinson's disease, but there was absolutely nothing more that I could do. There was nothing that the Government could do and nothing that anyone could do—not a sausage, not a bean. That was very depressing.

Within a few months, the old couple were dead. People may say that they were hounded to their graves. He died of a heart attack, and she died of grief shortly afterwards. The younger couple also met tragedy: they were involved in a car crash in which Trish lost her life and her husband was badly injured. Their land was taken away.

When I think of that episode, it fills me with rage. People should think of the economic consequences of that episode alone. They should think of the madness and the economic destruction that the policy of land reform has brought to Zimbabwe. Danbury farm near Mazowe could, in good times, produce enough seedcorn to feed 1 million people. It could produce 47,000 litres of cooking oil. That is what the old boy told me in his misery. It could produce 90 tonnes of edible beef a year. Now those people were to be kicked out and given nothing. They were not going to be paid for the value of their land; they were going to be paid a quarter of the value of the improvements that they had notionally made to the land, and moreover they were going to be paid in Zimbabwean dollars.

Although I had that experience of meeting a white farmer who was being dispossessed of his land, that is not the whole story; it is only a fraction of the story of what Mugabe is doing to his people. It is not a story of black on white oppression. It is the story of one man systematically tyrannising his people: 800,000 black farmers and farm workers have been driven off their land, with catastrophic consequences for the country. If people go to Zimbabwe, they will see that the disaster is of almost biblical proportions. Inflation is running at 300 per cent. According to Save the Children, 5.2 million people need food aid. The economy is contracting. I think that the figure was 12 per cent. for last year alone.

[Mr. Boris Johnson]

Mugabe spends a great proportion of his time flying around the African continent in increasingly desperate efforts to barter the patrimony of Zimbabwe for vital oil supplies. He is always off in Tripoli trying to persuade Gaddafi to supply him with oil. He is mortgaging Zimbabwe's future, as I am sure the Minister knows, by trying to do a deal involving the pipeline from Beira to Mutare. He basically placed that pipeline in the hands of the Libyans in exchange for short-term oil supplies.

Harare is a glorified car park. It is paralysed. There is simply not enough fuel for people to move around. That is to say nothing of the AIDS situation. I think that HIV affects about one in three—perhaps 35 per cent.—of the adult population. That is to say nothing of the routine torture and intimidation of members of the opposition, the expulsion of journalists and all the stuff that we have read about: the mayor of Harare was suddenly descended on by 15 policemen the other day and ordered to leave his office, and above all, ZANU-PF use what food supplies there are as a political weapon. Grain stocks are being used to bully and coerce, as was described not long ago by Peter Oborne, the political editor of a magazine in which I must declare an interest.

I do not think that this is the place for just another recitation—although I have just given one—of the charges against Mr. Mugabe. We do not need any more tub-thumping denunciations from this House about the black Hitler and all that sort of jazz. We have done all that. My aim is to see what we can do to begin to find a way out for that country and its people. By way of praeteritio, I want to deal with a solution that we will certainly not employ, agreeable though it might be for red-faced colonels in the home counties to speculate about it. There simply will not be—unless the Minister corrects me—a military solution to the Zimbabwe problem in the short term. Delightful though it may be to conjure up images of 2 Para investing Harare airport and the Special Boat Service going up the Limpopo, I do not think that that will happen.

I am sure that the Minister has had many discussions with his constituents about Iraq, and there comes a point in any discussion about Iraq when people say, "Well, what about Zimbabwe?" They say that it is inconsistent to displace a tyrant in the middle east but to leave another tyrant in place in Africa. There is some force in that argument, and it may be true that if cars were powered by bananas, Africa would have greater strategic importance in the eyes of the Pentagon than it does now. We all agree, however, that a military operation would be much harder than people think, chiefly because the lines of supply would not be guaranteed from any neighbouring country. That explains politically why the military option has been ruled out. Mugabe does not stand in relation to his neighbours as Saddam Hussein stood in relation to his.

What does that leave? It leaves diplomacy. I think that it will be common ground in this Chamber—unless the Minister corrects me—that British and global diplomatic efforts have been marked by catastrophic failure. If we are to get anywhere in this business, we must not just put ourselves in the shoes of people such as the Bayleys, easy though it may be to identify with them; we must also try to understand the mindset and the rhetoric of the thugs to whom I talked, who were besieging the farm. We need to go back into history, look at the origins of the crisis and discover whence Mugabe emerged as a liberation leader whose power emanated from the barrel of a gun. In the imagination of his people, he triumphed over the regime of Ian Smith, which was, let us make no bones about it, odious in its own way. We have to go back and understand the history of Zimbabwe and whence Mugabe emerged.

I am in some ways a defender of colonialism. I believe that there were some good things about the British empire. I say that with no shame. I take a Whiggish view of the empire, which I think brought great benefits to many parts of the world, but there is no doubt that what is now called Zimbabwe was acquired by expropriation. The pioneer column crossed the Limpopo in 1890 in search of gold and, failing to find gold, grabbed what land it could. As Martin Meredith has written in his excellent book on Mugabe, the scramble for land became little more than plunder. Farms were pegged out regardless of whether local people were living there. Arriving in 1896, a new administrator, William Milton, was appalled by the scale of the land distribution. As he said:

> "Jameson has given nearly the whole country away to Willoughby's whites, and others of that class so that there is absolutely no land left which is of any value."

The result was that by 1980, at the time of Zimbabwean independence, most of the productive land was still possessed by the whites. At the time of the Lancaster House talks, 6,000 large-scale white farmers owned 39 per cent. of the land and 8,000 small-scale black farmers owned 4 per cent. of the land. The remainder—inferior land—was held in common. In communal areas, the population density was three times greater than it was in what were thought of as the white areas.

There always has been—and still is—an overwhelming case for land reform in Zimbabwe. That should be common ground for all hon. Members in this Room. As Lord Carrington said at the time of the Lancaster House talks:

> "We recognise that the future Government of Zimbabwe, whatever its political complexion, will wish to extend land ownership."

Mugabe embarked on a desultory programme of land reform, partly financed by the British Government. It was not a wholly successful programme. Partly because Zimbabwe was doing quite well during the 1980s, the programme did not advance very far. Indeed, Mugabe relied very much on the white settlers to keep the Zimbabwean economy going. There then came the problem of his excessive longevity in power and his need to maintain his position.

During the referendum in 2000, Mugabe tried to accelerate the process of land reform constitutionally. He tried to play the anti-colonial, anti-settler card in order to buoy up his popularity and shore up his position in power. Failing in that referendum, he began the terrible pogroms of the sort that we have seen during the past three years. He incited the war veterans to begin despoiling the farms in the way that I saw last year.

If one wanted to be polemical about the way in which the Labour Government have handled land reform and Mugabe, one could say that they have made a pretty poor fist of it. One could say that they have oscillated

between apathy and a kind of megaphone diplomacy that simply played into Mugabe's hands because he was able to claim, "The big white chiefs are making a frightful noise in London. They are trying to boss us and bully us as they always used to. Why should we pay any heed to them?" One could make a case that the Government's handling of the issue has not been altogether brilliant.

On the other hand, one has to accept that Mugabe is largely to blame for the corruption of the land reform process and for a disgraceful episode that will go down as one of the most brutal and cynical acts of political manipulation in the past 20 years. It is a great disgrace. The question is what we do now.

There are several actors in the matter. There are the Europeans. In a hotly contested field, the most creepy example of recent French diplomacy was the decision to invite Mugabe to a summit in February, the day after European Union sanctions expired. I do not think that we can expect much real support or action from other EU countries.

A lot of hope is reposed in the other African countries. People often hope that Thabo Mbeki will do the business and pull the plug on Mugabe in the way that the apartheid regime in South Africa pulled the plug on Ian Smith. One has only to consider what Mugabe's fellow African leaders say about him to understand that they see Mugabe and the issue in a very different way. On his re-election in 2002, Daniel Arap Moi sent his

"congratulations and best wishes to his dear brother."

Benjamin Mpaka in Tanzania said Mugabe was "a champion of democracy" and added that

"the people of Zimbabwe have spoken loudly and clearly."

The more one listens to Thabo Mbeki, the clearer it becomes that the South Africans will not pull the plug. It is difficult for Thabo Mbeki to turn on a man whom he regards as a liberator and as his senior in the struggle for freedom for black Africa. Dismayingly, Mugabe attracts considerable support among black South Africans.

That leaves the Americans and us. The Americans are at last beginning to take notice. I was heartened by President Bush's recent visit and by the decision to stoke up interest in the subject in America, but we should not underestimate what we can do in Britain.

Who is Mugabe's greatest enemy? His greatest enemy is himself and the increasing damage that he is seen to be doing to Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwean economy. From talking to people in his regime, I am sure that he wants out. He wants to step down quietly at the age of 79 after 23 years in power. With at least half of his mind, he is aware of his failure and, more importantly, large numbers of people in ZANU-PF also recognise that he is their and Zimbabwe's leading liability.

The question for Members and the Government is whether we should make an exit for him. I have no doubt that ZANU-PF would like to restart dialogue with the British Government. Dialogue collapsed during the long row about land reform and was replaced by megaphone diplomacy, which I discussed earlier. An offer, which my hon. Friends will discuss in a moment and of which the Minister will be aware, will be put on the table. Mugabe, attended by all ceremony and dignity, will disappear from the scene. In return, he will achieve agreement on the following points: the acceptance of land reform with abuses to be dealt with; the recognition of the presidential election, which will be difficult; and the supply by Britain and other countries of substantial and immediate funds to pay for land reform and to assist Zimbabwe in its current plight.

Members and the Government must make a choice. We must work out whether Mugabe is bluffing in offering that so-called deal or whether there is a reason to open discussions. It may be that the deal is a typical ruse by a hardened tyrant who is trying to prolong his period in power. In my view, however, Mugabe's position is desperate: in 2000, some 660 British companies had investments in Zimbabwe; now 440 British companies invest in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, unemployment is running at 70 per cent. It would be a desperate thing for him to cling on, but desperate men may use desperate means.

Should we take the risk that Mugabe will continue to abuse his country until 2008, when his presidential term expires, or should we risk re-engaging with ZANU-PF, which may be seen as legitimising some of the monstrous things that he has done? One way or another, Zimbabwe will need our aid, which we are morally obliged to provide, to help to rebuild the country, which was once the bread-basket of Africa. One way or another, Mugabe will go and it will be sooner rather than later. It is a question for him: does he want to go like Ian Smith and continue to live in Harare or does he want a Ceausescu moment? We must think of the speediest method of removing a man who has done so much damage to his country. The tools at our disposal are limited, but as anybody who has travelled in sub-Saharan Africa knows, we are far more influential in that part of the world than is commonly supposed.

It is no longer good enough for the British Government to say that they are powerless and that anything they do makes matters worse. A policy of standing on one side is no longer good enough, and it is time for us to re-engage for the good of Zimbabwe and for the suffering people of that country.

9.54 am

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I congratulate the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) on securing the debate. He said that it was the 13th debate on the matter, and it may also be the 13th to take place in Westminster Hall. That is indicative of the Government's position and their embarrassment about the issue. It is a shame that we have never had the opportunity to debate the matter in the House.

I am the new chairman of the all-party Zimbabwe group, and this afternoon, the Zimbabwean high commissioner will meet it for the first time. I must, incidentally, apologise in advance as I am also on a three-line Whip and am expected to be in Select Committee at 10 o'clock, so I shall not be in the Chamber for the winding-up speeches. The Minister for Europe rather than the Minister responsible for Africa, attended the last debate. We did not, therefore, get much change from his speech or the subsequent debate.

We have a money laundering sub-committee in the Commonwealth secretariat, and we know from Transparency International that perhaps as much as $2

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billion has been taken by President Mugabe and placed in banks. From Transparency International, we think that the money is largely in Malaysia and the City of London. Is it beyond the wit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to organise with the Financial Services Authority an investigation into money laundering from Zimbabwe? I have raised this point before and will raise it again: if we can stop the flow of money, we can stop his future. When I went to UBS in Zurich, I was very impressed as it had 8,800 leads on Mugabe, his family and his Ministers going back 23 years. Not one of them led to UBS, and its representatives said in our meeting that all roads led to the City of London or Malaysia. We can raise the issue of his laundered money in this country.

I also want to press the Minister on the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. Will he explain what we are doing with CHOGM and the Commonwealth Secretariat? Don McKinnon is in Mputu this morning and he has been to the African Union Heads of State meetings over the past couple of days. CHOGM is due in Nigeria in December. It cannot be in President Obasanjo's interest to have the President of Zimbabwe arrive unannounced and uninvited to wait to be called on an airstrip in Abuja. The President of Nigeria and the secretary-general of the Commonwealth hold the cards. What conversations have the Government had with Don McKinnnon? We have a window of opportunity between now and December in which to resolve the Zimbabwe question.

I was a proud member of the London branch of the African National Congress for 10 years. Donald Woods, when he was alive, suggested a visit in the mid-1980s by eminent persons to South Africa, and that delegation published a report on its visit. Is that not a solution that would at least start the process of replacing Mugabe? By an agreement with the Commonwealth secretariat rather than the Government, could we not send a delegation of eminent persons to Zimbabwe before the CHOGM meeting, so that it can report on what it finds? It would be independent, untarnished by our colonial past and should be a proper, high-level visit by eminent people. I commend the Minister to follow that route.

President Obasanjo, President Mbeki and President Muluzi of Malawi met Morgan Tsvangari in Harare recently. Can the Minister confirm the four points that they discussed about President Mugabe's future? I believe that they discussed where he would live and a guarantee of his security. They discussed the idea that, if he stood down, there would be no court cases into any fraud, human rights abuses or money laundering. The case involving the former President of Kenya, President Moi, is now on its way to the High Court, and the former President of Zambia, President Chilumba, is on his way to the High Court in Zambia. It would seem remiss if President Mugabe were not also on his way to the High Court in due course. I would still like to know whether that was on the agenda when the three presidents met Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai.

Thirdly, I gather that President Mugabe is prepared to stand down if he can keep his money. I have raised this point before and will raise it again. Could we just turn off his money laundering?

Finally, President Mugabe wanted to name a successor. I understand that the Movement for Democratic Change realises that if there is going to be a shift in Government, there will have to be an interim Government. It is considering that and does not think it a bad idea. However, it will not accept all the other things on the agenda that Mugabe raised during the visit. Will the Minister confirm that?

Members who read *The Independent* will have seen that it features a front-page story reporting that Mugabe is involved in negotiations and that there seems to be some movement. Is that true? Will the Minister comment on that?

The disappointment for black Africa is the lack of black leadership. That is what we find difficult, given that it was, largely, a white colonial power that took Africa. The most disappointing person is President Mbeki. It is really depressing to hear him play up President Mugabe. He must know, through his own diplomatic sources and evidence, of the criminalisation of life in Zimbabwe. The hon. Member for Henley has already given statistics, and I do not want to go over all of them. He talked about the mayor of Harare, who was arrested twice last week. We should also consider that 800 opposition activists, some of whom have been beaten and tortured, have been arrested in the past six weeks. We have met some of the activists in the House. Some are held in police custody and have no access to the law, and 150 have been hospitalised. Mugabe does nothing to stop that. If the perpetrators are not prosecuted and there is no investigation, there is a breakdown and we have a failed state.

If it is right to bring about regime change in Iraq, it is also right to consider Zimbabwe in that context. We should not back away from the matter or be embarrassed about our colonial past. We are talking about the most disgraceful abuse of human rights anywhere in the world. It is shameful that it is allowed and that black presidents in neighbouring countries do not stand up to it. That is part of the disappointment.

Time is running out for Zimbabwe. A political settlement is needed as a matter of urgency. We might disagree about the exact figures, but about 5 million people need food aid, and fuel and electricity are short. Official inflation is running at 300 per cent., but I think that it is substantially more than that. The country has something of the Germany of the 1920s about it. There is no foreign currency, there is a shortage of bank notes and there is unemployment—employment is never a given in any African state—of between 70 and 85 per cent.

Zimbabwe was once the bread-basket of Africa. Over the past 50 years, it could have fed not only itself, but many surrounding countries. It is sad to see what a desperate state the country is in, and it is sad that we just stand by. We cannot support that policy any longer.

We need to engage President Mbeki and President Obasanjo. They are the two key elements in the jigsaw. We have about five months before CHOGM in Abuja on 5 to 8 December. We need to pressure Mugabe now to enter into unconditional negotiations.

10.3 am

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): I am both pleased and saddened that we are debating Zimbabwe again. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Henley

(Mr. Johnson) on securing the debate. It is timely because this afternoon sees the inaugural meeting of the all-party Zimbabwe group, which I hope to attend. If nothing else, it will show the broad cross-party support that exists, as demonstrated by the comments of the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt), with which I completely agree.

In spite of the fact that we have debated Zimbabwe 12 times in Westminster Hall since February 2000, we are here for the 13th time today, because we still take the matter extremely seriously. However, while we debate the issue, the situation in Zimbabwe worsens by the day and by the hour. I wonder, somewhat sadly and forlornly, whether we will be here again in weeks and months to come to debate the matter for the 14th time and to repeat the same impassioned, frustrated and desperate pleas, as we watch what was once the grain basket of Africa rapidly become its basket case.

I shall not rehearse the arguments that have been made today and in previous debates, but, before I come to the main thrust of my comments, I wish to discuss something with which I believe many others have struggled. In a statement on Iraq, the Prime Minister said,

"let us at least not forget the 4 million Iraqi exiles, and the thousands of children who die needlessly every year due to Saddam's impoverishment of his country—a country which in 1978 was wealthier than Portugal or Malaysia but is now in ruins, with 60 per cent. of its people on food aid. Let us not forget the tens of thousands imprisoned, tortured or executed by his barbarity every year. The innocent die every day in Iraq—victims of Saddam—and their plight, too, should be heard."—[*Official Report*, 25 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 125–26.]

On the very same day, at Foreign and Commonwealth questions, the Minister for Trade and Investment stated, in his remarks on human rights abuses in Zimbabwe:

"The situation in Zimbabwe continues to deteriorate. The leader of the opposition is on trial for treason. Arrests and torture of those opposed to President Mugabe's regime continue unabated. The economy is in crisis: unemployment is at over 70 per cent., inflation is above 200 per cent., the currency is in free fall, there is a critical shortage of foreign exchange, and more than 7 million Zimbabweans now need emergency food aid."

The rhetoric and barefaced facts in both statements are powerful. In the eyes of many, including me, the former was justification enough to go to war. Yet on the latter, the Minister for Trade and Investment concluded:

"We are doing what we can to feed the population",

and, later,

"if a regime is determined to destroy its own country and its own people, there is a limit to what the international community can do."—[*Official Report*, 25 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 105–07.]

In a previous debate on Zimbabwe some time ago, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw)—he has moved ministerial posts since then—accused me of advocating military intervention in Zimbabwe, although I was not advocating that at that time. I am not certain that I share the views so artfully articulated, as one would expect, by my hon. Friend the Member for Henley, because, if there were a genuine desire to use military intervention in Zimbabwe—which, again, I am not advocating this morning—I do not believe that it would pose the problems that my hon. Friend described.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Chris Mullin): I am confused. Is the hon. Gentleman advocating military intervention?

Mr. Swire: I am sorry that the Minister is confused. I am not necessarily advocating military intervention, but I am saying that, if there were a desire for military intervention, it would not involve the problems suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Henley. In other words, it would be possible to intervene militarily, but I am not saying that that is the answer.

Mr. Johnson: Since my hon. Friend has invoked my point about military intervention, perhaps I could clarify it? My intention was to describe the world as I see it, rather than as I would like to see it. I do not believe that military intervention in Zimbabwe is likely; I sought to get that point out of the way and then to consider the diplomatic possibilities. I share my hon. Friend's martial enthusiasm in principle, but believe that it is unlikely to be reflected in practice.

Mr. Swire: I should not wish it to go on the record that my martial enthusiasm extended to a full-blooded invasion of Zimbabwe, because that is not what I suggested. However, it is worth pointing out that the European Union President was keen to create an African peacekeeping force, the aim of which was boldly stated in the mission statement as being

"an African solution to African problems."

That force was to be accompanied by a European Union funding package of £170 million, but the President was thwarted in his intention because, as he said:

"We face a wall in any contacts, and that wall is Zimbabwe."

I leave it for others to comment on whether there is a message in that statement.

By drawing attention to the consistency or inconsistency between the statements made about the humanitarian raison d'être for using force in Iraq, and the lack of action in Zimbabwe, I was questioning whether the reactions to Saddam Hussein and Robert Mugabe were proportionately consistent. I am sure that many others struggle with that problem and think along similar lines, but that is not the central issue that I wish to pursue.

The issue on which I shall question a Minister again—although it will be the first time that I question the new Minister on it—is that of the Zimbabwe public service pensions for those who were in government service. Over the past few months, I have received visits at my surgeries and considerable correspondence from a number of Zimbabwean pensioners as well as the Overseas Service Pensioners' Association, about the cessation of their pension payments. Although no agreement was made on public officers when the Zimbabwean Government was formed at the time of independence, the then Minister in charge, Lord Trefgarne, wrote in December 1979 that the Zimbabwean independence constitution would contain full safeguards for public service pensions and their

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remittability. The 1979 Lancaster House agreement ensured that the Zimbabwe constitution would contain provisions relating to pensions payable in respect of the service of a public officer, and that pension benefits would continue to be paid to those no longer resident in Zimbabwe.

Nevertheless, as we have heard this morning, Zimbabwe has continued to be ravaged by Robert Mugabe, who presides over a country in which inflation has risen to 260 per cent., and where pessimists suggest that the figure may soon rise to 500 per cent. He is bankrupting the country and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Henley said, he has mortgaged the strategic oil assets to Libya, and plundered the country's exchequer. As a result of that and the rampant inflation, those pensioners' pensions have been rendered almost valueless. Those people, servants of the Crown, have been told by the Zimbabwean Government that payment of their pensions has ceased because the Government have no foreign currency. That has been the case since February.

Unlike Mr. Mugabe, those pensioners are not in a position to raise their salaries from 3 million Zimbabwean dollars to 20.2 million Zimbabwean dollars, with an additional 2 million Zimbabwean dollars in annual cash expenses, as he has done in the past few weeks, It is far easier to stay ahead of such colossal inflationary rises, when one is in a position to award oneself a 600 per cent. salary rise.

The assurances given at the time of Lancaster House were taken at face value, and we must remember the exceptional circumstances of that period. It seems that the Government, through a disingenuous argument, seek now to renege on a promise given in good faith. The reason why there is no safeguard for the former servants of the Crown is explained in a letter from the Foreign Secretary to Lord Waddington on 25 June. In it, he claims that because people were recruited on "local terms", the

"British Government therefore had no responsibility for matters connected with public administration".

The Foreign Secretary disavows any form of responsibility that we may hold towards these people, concluding that:

"Responsibility for payment of these pensions therefore rests with the Zimbabwe Government",

and hence,

"I fear that until the Zimbabwean economy improves, pension payments will continue to be intermittent at best."

He can say that again.

There we have it: because the people who once served our country were allegedly recruited locally by the then Rhodesian Government, they are no longer our responsibility. If that were the case, it would be at best unsatisfactory for us to try to wash our hands of what are blatantly our responsibilities, but even that premise has been robustly challenged by Lord Waddington. In another place on 27 June 2000, responding to a Minister's letter to the chairman of the OSPA, he was right to say that

"what the Minister was conveniently ignoring is that many of the Zimbabwe pensioners were in fact recruited here, on what were expatriate-type terms broadly similar to those of HMOCS"—Her Majesty's overseas civil service—

"officers in other dependent territories. Their passages were paid out to the territory, they took their leave entitlement back here and now, at the end of their service, they have retired here. It really is disingenuous to pretend that local people recruited locally in the colonies are in like case. Clearly they are not."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 27 June 2000; Vol. 614, c. 854.]

When the Under-Secretary, Baroness Amos, wrote to me in June last year, she was as unhelpful as the Foreign Secretary:

"I fear that until there is an improvement in the economic crisis in Zimbabwe, and the value of the Zimbabwean dollar on the foreign exchange market increases, there is unlikely to be any improvement in the level of pensions paid to pensioners. I know this will be of little consolation to your constituent".

That is dead right, although I do not even need to answer that further because the constituent who has had his pension frozen, Mr. Wade, answered it for me when he wrote:

"The situation is daily becoming more desperate, not just for the whites, but for the whole community, and just what are we doing politically?—Sweet nothing!"

It is also worth remembering that the British Government have continued to pump money into Zimbabwe—some £51 million since 2001, and an estimated £35 million in contributions this year alone. Mr. Wade's sentiments are echoed by another constituent, Mr. Bibby:

"It seems that Mugabe will be allowed to carry on intimidating and murdering all who stand in his way, and, no doubt, we will spend tax payers' money feeding the starving inhabitants of that benighted country which is entirely attributable to Mugabe's megalomania. We live in strange times".

Mr. Mullin: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that we should not be feeding the starving in Zimbabwe?

Mr. Swire: I am not, and if the Minister had been paying attention, he would realise that I was quoting a constituent's letter that merely showed the exasperation felt by many of the pensioners who cannot understand the Government's inactivity. If the Minister allows me to conclude my remarks, I will answer the point in due course.

What does the Minister intend to do to help the people whose pensions have been effectively wiped out? It is no good keeping his head down and hoping that an economic miracle will take place in Zimbabwe. Those people need help and deserve the good faith of a Government who so far appear happy to have turned a blind eye to the problem. Will they consider doing what they did with Aden and Somalia? For other reasons, it was not possible to make a public officers' agreement with the emerging Government, so a loan advance scheme was set up that protected the pensioners for as long as necessary.

The 1,200 pensioners living in this country, 700 of whom were recruited through Rhodesia House—the then Southern Rhodesian Government office in London—are in desperate circumstances. They are owed not only an explanation, but prompt action. The Overseas Pensions Act 1973 would allow Her Majesty's Government to protect the pensions of Zimbabwe public service pensioners in the same way as those of British colonial pensioners. Contrary to what has been stated by Ministers, some groups of pensioners are not

covered by public officers' agreements, through which pensions are protected by the Government, and I would welcome the Minister's remarks on that.

The Minister asked whether I thought that we should cease aid to Zimbabwe and allow people to starve just because pensioners in this country are not receiving their pensions. Of course I am not suggesting that. I remind the Minister that I have tabled a number of questions and repeatedly asked what the Government are doing to trace the millions stolen by President Mugabe—the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey suggested earlier that that figure was as much as £2 billion. It is no good saying that whenever we suggest taking action, we are exacerbating the situation politically or economically, because people do not believe that.

I concede that the most important thing to do at the moment is to rid Zimbabwe of the benighted influence of its self-elected President. I am heartened by reports from Pretoria last week that President Bush met President Mbeki to discuss a £6.2 billion reconstruction package over an unspecified time and perhaps elections in 2004 that could involve the exit of Mugabe. I do not wish to discuss my own views on what should happen to Mugabe—whether he should be pursued by a high court, whether all his international assets should be sequestered, or whether he should not be given domicile in this country—because it is more important to get rid of him first on almost any condition that he takes.

However, we are talking about 2004, which is a long time for those who are not receiving their pensions, and a deal between the Americans and the South Africans, with, yet again, Britain playing no role. I find that humiliating. The point that I am trying to make is that, although the Government can continue to deny legal responsibility for the pensioners, they can no longer ignore their moral responsibility.

10.23 am

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): It is extremely depressing to meet again, for the 13th time in a few short years, to discuss a matter that seems only to get worse without any decent progress being made. Like others, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) for securing the debate and setting out a range of issues and points of view, which deserve serious answer from the Minister. The hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt), who has had to leave the Chamber, also set out important questions, in particular about money laundering to which I will return. As the new chair of the all-party Zimbabwe group, he has tackled his brief with enthusiasm and vigour and already instigated a series of initiatives that will hopefully add a perspective, which has been lacking until now, on Parliament's role in the whole sorry saga.

The hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) commented on many of those issues, but also highlighted the serious case of those people in Britain whose pensions are in some difficulty. I hope that the Minister will shed light on that, not least because the 1,200 or so affected are spread throughout the United Kingdom.

Many of the developments have been set out by other speakers, each of them apologising for repeating a well-known story. The seriousness of that story is none the less such that it bears repetition and requires us to confront uncomfortable facts. Every current measure in Zimbabwe is designed to hold on to the power that was stolen in last year's election. Measures may be legal, although they are mostly illegal. They involve torture, rape, murder and a huge list of atrocities. There have been sustained efforts against the Movement for Democratic Change. There have been charges against its leader Morgan Tsvangirai for an alleged murder plot against Mugabe or for organising the stay aways over the past few months.

We must not lose sight of the fact that despite all that intimidation and the real dangers to themselves and their families, thousands of people in Zimbabwe keep taking to the streets. Everywhere they turn, ZANU-PF is waiting with some trumped-up charge or some simple, ugly violence. Only a few days ago the mayor of Harare was the latest to bear the brunt of that. This is more than just a political crisis. It entails serious abuses of human rights that have been documented here this morning and by many international groups.

Amnesty International in its 2003 report sets out the catalogue of violations. They include extra-judicial executions by the Zimbabwe defence force, impunity for state or state-backed groups who commit atrocities, intimidation of the judiciary, and the repression of freedom of expression, association and assembly, which are basic freedoms that we take for granted here in Britain and elsewhere in the west. More than 1,000 cases of torture were reported to Amnesty in 2002.

We must never lose sight of that stark figure, not least because it happens against the backdrop of an economy that adds humanitarian angles to the human rights abuses and the political disgrace of Zimbabwe. It is an economy on its knees. Maize production from the once great producer in Africa now feeds barely 50 per cent. of Zimbabwe's people. Two million people still need food aid. The United Nations estimates that perhaps as many as 5.5 million will need humanitarian assistance by the end of this year.

Responses from across the world have been inadequate. Indeed, the whole world community has been paralysed. It has been taunted by a dangerous dictator and ridiculed by a regime that, despite its lack of public support, its bankrupt economy and collapsing Government infrastructure, still manages to outmanoeuvre and outwit its neighbours, the European Union, the United States and the entire UN. It is the people of Zimbabwe who pay the price.

There is a major responsibility on the African countries, which was highlighted earlier this morning. President Mbeki has claimed that there is a dialogue between ZANU-PF and the MDC, a claim that is rejected by the leadership of the MDC itself. The African Union shows how seriously it takes this crisis by awarding Zimbabwe a prominent position in its secretariat. The New Partnership for Africa's Development, the great hope for Africa and Africa's ability to take these issues on itself and to sort out its own problems, now seems doomed with its hopes dashed. As the Amnesty International report puts it, efforts to promote Zimbabwe as a test of the efficacy of the newly launched African Union and NEPAD have failed, following the reluctance of most African leaders to condemn the Zimbabwean Government's human

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rights record. That is not being said by some partisan politician in the UK or elsewhere, but by Amnesty International.

Africa's failure has been supported—if that is the right word—by the European Union. We have anguished about it and wrung our hands, but we have implemented only limited sanctions. Our political position has been undermined by the French, who allowed Mugabe to visit their country—that leaves a bitter taste in many people's mouths. In the United States, we have heard increasingly strong words from Secretary of State Colin Powell, yet in South Africa last week, President Bush's comments appeared to soften the tone and to weaken the position that America had begun to develop.

This morning's report in *The Independent*, referred to earlier, hints at the prospect of a deal. If there is such a prospect, I hope that the Minister will clarify the situation. I make it abundantly clear that this country is not interested in some kind of mediated handover from one ZANU-PF thug to another. If there is to be a transition in Zimbabwe, it must be on the basis of fresh elections.

The UK Government have been strong on rhetoric but they suffer from paralysis. The Minister is new to his portfolio; I hope that he brings a new perspective to it. During his career, he has gained the reputation of being a renowned champion of human rights causes, and there could be no greater challenge than Zimbabwe. The Government must back up their denunciations with efforts, clamp down on exemptions to existing sanctions, extend those sanctions to cover the wives and families of those on the list, and widen the pool of ZANU-PF officials who are covered by it.

As the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey mentioned, the Government must focus on the regime's business partners based in the EU. There are huge new powers in the UK to investigate money laundering. Much is at stake in the City of London, yet there is precious little evidence that any money has been tracked down.

We must broaden the Government's diplomatic operations, and take more action at the United Nations. The Foreign Secretary has argued that there is no majority at the UN in favour of action, but—as was demonstrated during the Iraq crisis—this is surely not a Government who should be cowed by being in a minority. They should be taking the debate to the UN and ensuring that we know who is opposed to sanctions and other actions against Zimbabwe.

Perhaps most fundamentally, we must make up our mind about the MDC. There are major issues concerning any Government intervening in another country's politics. Elected Governments must respect other legitimately elected Governments, but does anybody seriously believe that ZANU-PF is properly and democratically elected, or that Mugabe is the rightful President of Zimbabwe? If the British Government cannot change their position, they should explain why not, but they should not stand in the way of other bodies that could and should be seeking to promote democracy in Zimbabwe. The MDC has routinely demonstrated its credentials and has withstood intimidation on a grand scale; it should have our support.

The post-colonial guilt trip is played against this Government all the time. Rather than continuing to be blinded by it, they must see past it. Rather than being conned, the UK Government should be challenging Mugabe and his regime, holding up the MDC as the hope for the future and agitating on the world stage for real and effective change.

10.34 am

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I warmly welcome the Minister to his new role. He carries with him a fine reputation for human rights awareness, so we will be very interested to hear what he has to say today. I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) on introducing this important debate. Over a long period he has directly and indirectly highlighted the tragedy of Zimbabwe, and we are grateful for the very forceful way in which he has brought the matter to the House's attention this morning. I also very much welcome the establishment of the all-party Zimbabwe group.

As we have heard, Zimbabwe remains in the grip of terror. It is locked in a horrifying downward spiral. Zimbabweans suffer unparalleled economic hardship and brutality, which has come about directly because of the Mugabe regime. When farm occupations started, we knew exactly where they would lead. A legitimate desire for land reform was used as an excuse. Illegal seizure of farmland, coupled with increasing violence, was simply the start of a process of collapse and chaos that has continued unabated. We have seen destruction coupled with economic implosion and starvation, all to a terrifying and sinister backdrop of violence. I applaud my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire), who raised the tragic plight of pensioners who worked as civil servants for the Crown. I hope that the Minister will respond to his points.

My right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary and his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), called for action to halt Mugabe's thuggery at each stage at which it became worse. We called for specific action each time, and we are sad and regret that the Government, indeed the whole international community, have reacted very slowly. The Government initially pleaded for caution, then moved on to say that firm action was being taken. We must ask what action that was. Targeted sanctions and travel bans were introduced only after enormous prompting from Conservative Members and others, and they are, even now, sporadic and unfocused.

In spite of all that, Zimbabweans have come validly as refugees to this country, and some to my constituency. The Home Office appears to believe that Zimbabwe is a place to which it is safe for asylum seekers who seek to stay in the UK to return. Is that really what the Government believe? We need some clarity on that.

My hon. Friends and others have talked about the terrifying economic statistics that provide the backdrop to the situation in Zimbabwe, so I shall not rehearse them. How the country has deteriorated is almost beyond description. The once thriving agricultural sector collapsed last year after confiscation of

commercial farms. That was done supposedly for the poor and dispossessed, but land reform actually benefited Mugabe's cronies, the apparatchiks of ZANU-PF and his stalwarts. It certainly did not help landless peasants. On money laundering and the acquisition of properties and moneys abroad, the point made by the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) was very telling.

The productive land of Zimbabwe lies idle and uncultivated while starvation bites deeper. I saw that for myself last summer when I visited Zimbabwe with my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary. Human rights have been routinely abused. Recently, the persecution of opposition MDC supporters has intensified, and everyone is suffering in consequence. I heard about that, in the most graphic and moving detail a matter of weeks ago from Archbishop Ncube of Bulawayo, who, when in London, spelled out what was happening, so tragically, in Matabeleland. Last month came the arrest of the opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai. He was paraded in a courtroom in shackles and leg irons before being released on bail on 20 June. His offence was to call for work stoppages and demonstrations to protest non-violently at the economic suffering and political repression. His supporters have been targeted equally.

I echo the points of the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore). For many months we have pressed for the involvement of the United Nations Security Council. I recognise the difficulties involved. We have been told that the UN could not get involved because events in Zimbabwe were an "internal matter". We were told that it becomes involved only when civil war, genocide and wanton destruction spill into surrounding countries. I put it to the Minister that all the ingredients for civil war between the two major tribal groupings are already in place. Indeed, there have been warnings of genocide from Archbishop Ncube and others. There is absolutely no doubt that the crisis in Zimbabwe is spilling into surrounding countries, leading to a dramatic drop in inward investment and considerable numbers of refugees.

South Africa and its African partners understandably fear the repercussions of the state collapse that is happening before their eyes. Two million Zimbabwean refugees are now in South Africa, and we know the effect on the South African economy and its reputation. Damage has been done to the entire continent's admirable efforts to establish new political and trade relationships with the rest of the world through the New Partnership for Africa's Development, part of which deals with good governance.

No matter how brutal state-sponsored violence is, it is no longer great enough to produce compliance among the civilian population. We have seen that recently. Civil rights groups, trade unionists and ordinary people are taking to the streets, staying away from work and challenging the legitimacy of the Government. Despite claims that it was taking a strong line in imposing targeted sanctions and travel bans on leading figures in Mugabe's regime, the so-called common position of the EU was shown to be a sham when Mr. Mugabe visited President Chirac—a point made by the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale. To those who think it right to establish a public dialogue with Mugabe, I say that it simply leads to a further deterioration in the situation and reinforces the leadership of that individual, as we have seen over and over. It has the reverse effect from the original intention.

Yesterday, President Mbeki spoke on radio and television in the UK during President Bush's important tour of Africa. He was explicit in his revelation of discussions between ZANU-PF and the MDC. I was perplexed when I listened to his talk of discussions and Mugabe stepping down. Frankly, we have heard it before, and all too often. I find it hard to believe that Mugabe will willingly surrender power after all that he has done to preserve it. Both ZANU-PF and the MDC have specifically contradicted President Mbeki's view.

Mugabe has been named as the African Union's ambassador for southern Africa. That sends a message merely of acceptance and tolerance of Mugabe's crimes, which should not be the underlying intention of the AU. It is quite extraordinary. Each time we have been told that progress is being made, we have seen precious few results. If there has been softly-softly diplomacy and people believe that progress might be made after so many false dawns and contradictory messages have emanated from Harare, it is not unreasonable that we should look for some sign from Mugabe. The violence must end, and be seen to have ended. That must be concrete, and a clear message must be sent that something positive is being achieved. If President Mbeki is sponsoring some unofficial dialogue, he must continue to press for cessation of the violence as part and parcel of the process, and he should say so openly and publicly.

What light can the Minister shed on recent events and President Mbeki's comments? If there is an agreement in the offing to end the downward spiral of thuggery and economic misery, it will, of course, be welcome, but there can be no resolution until the downward spiral is brought to a halt, Mugabe steps down and free and fair elections take place. Until we see some clear signs of that happening, pressure from the international community must continue.

10.45 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Chris Mullin): May I make it clear at the outset that the Government share the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) and his colleagues about the dreadful situation in Zimbabwe? We welcome constructive contributions to the debate on how to deal with the matter and we share the widespread frustration of all decent people that there are no easy or immediate solutions to the plight of Zimbabwe and its people.

During the past two years, there has been a great deal of huffing and puffing from some Opposition Members. As the hon. Member for Henley said, this is our 13th debate on the matter and there has been a marked absence of constructive suggestions. I was pleasantly surprised by the hon. Gentleman's demeanour, but not by that of the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire). In the Opposition's wilder moments, military action has been suggested, which, as the hon. Member for Henley hinted, may play well in the saloon bars of Henley and East Devon, but which makes us a laughing stock in the real world.

Mr. Swire: I sought earlier to put the record straight. I was not arguing for military intervention in

[Mr. Swire]

Zimbabwe, but pointing out its feasibility and disagreeing with my hon. Friend the Member for Henley about that. It is disingenuous of the Minister to repeat what is not the truth.

Mr. Mullin: I was not entirely clear what the hon. Gentleman was suggesting, but he raised the possibility of military action and some of his colleagues, who are not present today, have also done so. I am pleased to hear that the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), after some hesitation, has confirmed to the Foreign Secretary that he, at least, is not proposing military action. I hope that we shall hear no more of such folly.

I have read the contributions of the hon. Member for Henley to *The Spectator* and *The Daily Telegraph* which, understandably, focus on the plight of white farmers whose land has been brutally and illegally expropriated. I do not want to minimise the plight of families such as the Bayleys, which he described so movingly, but, outrageous as it is, it pales into insignificance when compared with the plight of the hundreds of thousands of black farm workers and their families who worked on the appropriated white farms, many of whom face destitution and starvation.

Before I move on, I could perhaps make another point. The worst atrocities in Zimbabwe occurred not during the past two or three years, but during the early years of the Mugabe regime when his army slaughtered thousands of people in Matabeleland. It is a matter of record that the Government in power at that time were Conservative. It is also a matter of record that they had little or nothing to say on the subject. They were unable to summon even a tiny fraction of the outrage that they have managed to summon over the dispossession of white farmers. Indeed, I am told that Mugabe later registered his appreciation for the understanding that they had shown over the problem in Matabeleland. So let us have no more nonsense of the sort that we sometimes hear—not necessarily today—from Conservative Members about the Government walking by on the other side of the road.

I utterly refute the assertion that we do not take the situation in Zimbabwe seriously enough. That is manifestly not the case. We have done as much as or more than any other country to draw the world's attention to what is happening in Zimbabwe. From the outset we have worked with the Commonwealth, the European Union, the United States and—most importantly—other countries in the region to isolate the ZANU-PF regime. We have helped to secure Commonwealth sanctions, EU sanctions and Zimbabwe's suspension from the International Monetary Fund. We will not support sanctions that make the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans any harder than they are at the moment. I assume that we can count on the Opposition to support that position.

EU sanctions, which include a travel ban, an asset freeze and an arms embargo, are targeted at the guilty rather than the innocent. In addition, on 6 June, the IMF suspended Zimbabwe's voting rights—the only time that that has happened to a country not involved in conflict. In effect, Mugabe has imposed his own sanctions on Zimbabwe. It has been suggested that sanctions should be extended to business people with alleged connections to ZANU-PF. The EU has so far not taken that step, but it remains an option that cannot be ruled out.

The hon. Members for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) and for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) suggested that we should move a resolution at the UN Security Council. Hon. Members will know that the UN Commission on Human Rights is the major forum for addressing human rights abuses. The EU, with the support of the UK, has proposed resolutions on Zimbabwe at the commission in each of the past two years. On both occasions the resolutions were lost to no-action motions. Of the 11 Security Council members on the commission this year, six—including all the African countries—supported no action. Hon. Members may find that frustrating, as do I, but if Zimbabwe's neighbours do not consider that its problems merit UN discussion, there is not the slightest chance of a draft resolution being passed by the Security Council, and even to propose one would be an own goal.

We are working closely with the South Africans, and it is right that they should have the lead role as they are, after all, in the front line. They are playing host to perhaps 1 million Zimbabwean refugees, so they are as aware as anybody of the ruin that Mugabe and ZANU-PF have brought upon Zimbabwe. They have as much interest as anybody in a peaceful transition to a stable and democratic Zimbabwe.

The South Africans have not been inactive. In May, the South African President together with the Presidents of Malawi and of Nigeria went to Harare to discuss with all parties the prospects for a peaceful transition. That dialogue continues; the Prime Minister saw President Mbeki yesterday who again confirmed that there are informal contacts between the Zimbabwean parties, some of which are mediated by the South Africans and some by church groups. President Bush saw President Mbeki on 9 July and noted that the US and South Africa share the same objectives and that he would not second guess President Mbeki, and I do not think that we ought to either.

Mr. Spring: That is an extremely important point, and we all agree that South Africa has a lead role. If President Mbeki is sponsoring those unofficial contacts, that is good. I hope that the Minister, through the Foreign Secretary or the Prime Minister, will make it absolutely clear that there should be no dialogue while physical persecution is directed against the MDC. There is no encouragement for the MDC to act while their lives and those of their families are at risk every day.

Mr. Mullin: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. There are some informal contacts, because I guess that some members of ZANU-PF know that the regime is ending. Not all of them approve of what has been going on over the years and they may be looking for an exit strategy. It is not unreasonable to suspect that informal contact is being made. It is in the interests of both parties, with a view to providing some kind of transitional Government prior to free elections. However, I entirely agree with the hon. Member for

Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale that free elections must be the ultimate goal so that a new democratic regime can be installed.

Mr. Spring: The Minister has not addressed my central point. I accept what he says, but I merely pointed out that there is no basis for the MDC to have confidence in an ongoing dialogue if its supporters are subject to persecution. The British Government must say to our South African friends, who may be sponsoring the dialogue, that if it is to prosper, there must be a clear indication from Mugabe that he will stop the persecution.

Mr. Mullin: I do not want to speak for the MDC, which is on the front line: indeed, none of us should. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, and I would not encourage formal contact if persecution took place daily. However, such contacts are taking place informally, and I hope that they will be formal before long.

I will now say a word about the humanitarian crisis and our contribution to dealing with it. Last year we helped to feed more than 7 million Zimbabweans; this year we expect about 5.5 million to require food aid. In addition, about 35 per cent. of the population is HIV-infected. The UK Government have led the international response to the humanitarian crisis. We are the largest European bilateral aid donor and the second overall after the United States. We will continue to contribute significantly to humanitarian relief for the foreseeable future. It is not without irony that Britain and the United States—the two countries most regularly singled out for criticism by Mugabe—are doing more to feed his people than he is. In addition to feeding programmes, we maintain a substantial programme to tackle HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe, and we expect to spend £26 million on the project over five years.

I will briefly touch on some points raised by hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt). If I am not able to deal with all the points made, I will write to hon. Members. Like others, my hon. Friend asked about money laundering. If he or anyone else has evidence that Zimbabwean money is being laundered through the City of London, he should give it to us and we will pass it on to the Financial Services Authority—that point has been made to him before. We require evidence before we can proceed.

I agree that it is highly undesirable that Mugabe should be present at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, and President Obasanjo of Nigeria, who is hosting the conference, is well aware of that and active on the subject. I will meet the Commonwealth secretary-general on Thursday, and we will undoubtedly discuss that issue.

The hon. Member for East Devon asked about pensioners. The fact is that many of those affected are not servants of the Crown. I am sorry if that argument is disappointing, and I understand he will be disappointed for those concerned. There is no obligation under the Lancaster House agreement, which the Government made clear at the time. The Government are responsible for paying the small number of colonial pensioners now resident in Zimbabwe, who were recruited by or on behalf of the Secretary of State for the Colonies to serve on expatriate terms. We also pay British state pensions to some British citizens living in Zimbabwe.

We do not think that it is safe for refugees to return to Zimbabwe. I am involved in discussions with the Home Office about the letter that has been distributed.

In conclusion, although it can sometimes be frustrating, we must work through international institutions and with our international partners. It would be absolute folly for the UK to act unilaterally, and the Zimbabwean opposition groups are not asking us to. On the contrary, they recognise, as most sensible people do, that unilateral action by the UK would play straight into the hands of Mugabe and his henchmen—he would like nothing better. Indeed, he never tires of trying to blame the problems of his country on Britain, and we should not provide him with a further excuse for doing so.

A350 (Dorset)

11 am

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): This debate is about the misery of the thousands of my poor blighted constituents who live along the A350 in Dorset. I wish to express my thanks to Dorset county council, the North Dorset Roads Action Group and various parish and town councils for helping me to prepare for this debate. I also wish to thank officials at the Government office for the south-west, who were always courteous but who were unable to give my constituents or me the answers that we sought. I congratulate the Secretary of State on his recent announcement to spend some £7 billion on new motorway projects. Unfortunately, once again, there are no funds for the south-west, but I welcome his realisation that the seven-year moratorium on road building has been short-sighted.

One of the reasons why motorways are so badly congested by short and medium-distance traffic is that far too many A-roads are inadequate. The problem must be tackled in parallel with improvements to motorways and public transport, but improvements to A-roads will benefit most people and will be infinitely more cost-effective than the other two aspirations.

An example of that is the A350 in Dorset, which runs through my constituency. It is an important route but a very bad road. It is of considerable local and strategic importance, but it is a terrible, inadequate, slow and dangerous road. The route provides the only northern link between the south-east Dorset conurbation around Bournemouth, which, with the port at Poole, is the second largest in the south-west, and the hinterland of market towns to the north and west. It connects the south coast and the continent, directly or via the A36 to the M4, the Bristol/Bath conurbation, south Wales, the west midlands, the north-west and even Ireland.

Every day, 10,000 vehicles use the road. Drivers tolerate insufferable road conditions, driving at an average of just 33 mph at best—half the speed that they should reasonably expect. They have no alternatives. There are no railways, and there is no way that traffic can be diverted—nor should it be, as a high proportion of it is local traffic, which includes the small-business economy of the south-west going about its everyday activities. Ordinary people use the only means of transport that is available to them—their motor cars—to go to work, to go shopping, to take their children to school and to conduct their lives.

The economy of the area is underachieving because of the run-down in agriculture and because companies are not investing there, largely because of inadequate infrastructure, including roads. Yet the Government are imposing an increasing housing commitment of some 5,000 houses on the north Dorset district. That is welcome, because lower-priced homes might offer the chance to local young people to stay and not have to emigrate from the area, but there is every prospect that already heavy traffic will increase dramatically and that the chaos of building will start years ahead of improved road infrastructure, for which there are no plans anyway.

Some of the major treasures in Dorset are its villages, which are set in spectacular scenery. They have the potential to attract tourism, but tourist visiting is low because of poor access. Villages and some small towns such as Shaftesbury and Blandford suffer blight from traffic because the A350 road is so bad. Its alignment is 18th century: narrow, rarely more than 4 m in width, whereas the minimum for a modern A road is 6 m; and there are steep hills and blind bends. The road fails even to come up to the standard of a basic service road to a new housing estate. The Department for Transport condemned it 10 years ago as not only inadequate but not fit for on-line improvement.

Between Shaftesbury and Sturminster Marshall, 11 villages in a distance of 20 miles are polluted and afflicted by thousands of vehicles a day, including 42-tonne trucks with six axles, passing at 30–40 mph only a couple of feet from people's homes. Cottages and heritage-listed buildings alike are being shaken to bits. The A350 is so bad in parts that more than half the drivers—about 5,000 a day—find it more convenient to use the "rat run" of the C13, a country lane that fortuitously runs parallel to the main road. It is, however, no safer, and as a country lane it is, of course, inadequate for the size and weight of modern traffic.

The existing A350 road severs villages and prevents people from being able to walk to their neighbours and children from walking to their friends. Overall, the A350 renders these villages "non-communities" with no personal contact, very few amenities, and no or scant public transport. They are cold, empty dormitories. The noise and smells in these villages and small-town environments are horrific. The risk of accidents and damage to homes, for which there is no public recompense, is high and occurs weekly.

Fortunately or, at risk of sounding perverse, unfortunately, there have been few fatalities. There are overpowering traffic, economic, social and environmental reasons to invest in a new and improved road rather than in the existing A350 road. Let us therefore consider the case for a solution and the current state of the proposals. The case is clear: the volume, weight and speed of motor vehicles in the villages in the A350-B3081-C13 corridor between Shaftesbury and Sturminster Marshall are dangerous and damaging hazards to people and the environment.

There is a need for traffic control measures in the villages in the short term, but however successful they might be, they do not obviate the need for a series of properly designed and constructed bypasses that are sensitive to local needs and the environment. The impact on through traffic on existing communities in the corridor is unacceptable. Current Government policies concentrate development pressure within the principal urban areas, so existing problems are likely only to be exacerbated. The case for a proper, purpose-built bypass was first proposed by Dorset county council in 1933, when the volume of traffic was one twentieth of the current level and the weights of heavy goods vehicles were one tenth of what they are today.

The Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole structure plan, which was published in February 2001, states that

"traffic in Dorset grew by 54 per cent. in the 15 years since 1983 and is forecast to grow by a further 29 per cent. by the year 2001".

We have passed that date. Two major road schemes have been proposed for this corridor. The first is the Melbury Abbas bypass. Dorset county council applied for planning permission for the C13 improvement and

the Melbury Abbas bypass in 1995. The main reasons given for the scheme were to promote regional economic development and to improve environmental conditions for people living alongside existing main roads.

The A350 is an important link in the primary road network between centres of economic activity in south Dorset and the national trunk network in the north. The A350 is narrow, tortuous and substandard for its purpose. A high percentage of heavy goods vehicles use the road, sections of which are too narrow for two-way traffic. In fact, two articulated lorries cannot pass at 35 points on that stretch of the road. Most of the length of the C13, which is the higher Shaftesbury road and the alternative route between Blandford and Shaftesbury, is of reasonably good standard, with the exception of the short section through Melbury Abbas village, which is narrow and has sharp bends and steep gradients. The combination of relatively high traffic flows and poor road alignments gives rise to accidents and environment nuisance to those living alongside the A350 and the C13-B3081.

Traffic levels have increased since 1995, and future planning policies are likely to focus more development in the south-east Dorset conurbation and exacerbate the existing problems. The National Trust and others objected to the application on the ground that the road scheme would be environmentally unacceptable. That was at a time when the structure plan was nearing adoption. The joint structure plan authorities decided to withdraw the proposed scheme for a Melbury Abbas bypass from the structure plan, as it was considered that, at the time, the scheme's environmental impact would outweigh its social and economic merits.

However, the authorities decided that for the structure plan period—up to 2011—it was appropriate to propose improvements on a smaller scale to those previously proposed, which could and should include a bypass. Importantly, however, longer-term options would depend on the outcome of the proposed multi-modal study on the routes between the south coast and the M4/M5, including the A350 corridor, which had been proposed at that time by the south-west regional planning conference.

South of Blandford is the equally important proposal for the Charlton Marshall, Spetisbury and Sturminster Marshall bypass. The issues concerning that bypass are similar to those concerning Melbury Abbas. This scheme, together with the northern section that I have described, is currently the county's second highest priority, and is contained in the structure plan, the north Dorset local plan and the east Dorset local plan. The environmental impact of this southern scheme is much less damaging than that of the schemes considered for Melbury Abbas, and although this scheme is in the approved plan, the current Bristol/Bath to south-coast study outcomes could prejudice its construction.

I am concerned that the Government office for the south-west believes that Dorset receives ample funding for highways and transport. The county has frequently argued with the office that it does not receive as much money as other authorities in the south-west. Although the office has increased the annual settlement for integrated transport in Dorset at a higher rate than for other authorities—for which we are grateful—Dorset remains the worst funded authority when comparing capital settlements on a per capita basis.

The current year's annual settlement for integrated transport in Dorset is £3.247 million. Funding comes in the form of credit approvals as part of a single capital pot. Unlike other authorities, however, the county can add money from its own resources, so the total capital budget is some £6.3 million. The county could raise its council tax to even higher levels than at present, but that would be politically unacceptable and perhaps would go wider than the debate. The county also has freedoms to transfer funds from other areas of its capital programme, but those are also in politically sensitive areas, such as education, which has its own history of underfunding.

It should be stressed that the integrated transport allocations made through the local transport plan are generally low or medium-cost schemes, identified in the plan for meeting Government-led targets on road safety, encouraging alternative forms of transport, and improving accessibility in rural areas. The funding is used to address the main issues raised through best value and local transport plan consultations.

Funding for major projects costing more than £5 million—such as the project in question—is different. Any improvement schemes in the A350 corridor would fit into that category. Conventionally, such schemes have been funded in the form of a 50 per cent. transport supplementary grant, and 50 per cent. basic credit approvals. Either way, the funding has to be bid for and allocated as part of the local transport plan process. In previous LTP rounds, local authorities were generally limited to one major scheme per authority, and Dorset already has the Weymouth relief road.

To achieve success in the bidding process, the project must meet Government criteria and have the support of the Government office for the south-west. That office has consistently failed to provide the policy context or support for schemes in that corridor. Will the Minister acknowledge the need for the scheme, abandon the arbitrary nonsense of allowing only one major scheme per county at any one time, and instruct the Government office for the south-west to move forward with Dorset county council to bring the scheme to fruition? That will give hope to the thousands of my constituents who live in daily misery along that road.

11.15 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) on securing this debate on a matter that is important to his constituents. I have some familiarity with the road concerned, having travelled down it a few weeks ago. Although it is an attractive route, going north, I agree with him that it is not an ideal route for the throughput of traffic.

In his introduction, the hon. Gentleman welcomed the £7 billion that was announced last week in relation to the multi-modal studies for roads. He then said that there was nothing for the south-west. I also saw a headline in the *Western Morning News* last week saying that nothing had been announced for the south-west. However, that is because the announcement on the south-west was made six months earlier—late last year. For the record, so that no one will leave the debate believing that nothing has been done for the south-

[Mr. David Jamieson]

west, I remind hon. Members of the substantial improvements to the A303 east of Ilminster, of the four local transport schemes around Bristol, and of the fact that Cornwall has benefited hugely from a couple of bypasses. There have been many other improvements. The south-west has not been ignored, but received its announcement earlier than other regions.

The hon. Gentleman said that there were no plans for better roads in his constituency. The majority of the roads in his constituency will be local, and Dorset county council has responsibility for those. Perhaps he should address some of the issues that he raised to his colleagues on the council. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the issue of bypasses along the route of the A350. Having travelled down the route, I can see that such bypasses would be attractive to a motorist. However, I am not sure that they would be cost-effective, and their environmental impact would be enormous. I did not study the road carefully as I travelled down it, but I would have thought that bypassing every village on the route would have an enormous impact on the environment. I believe that one of the reasons why the idea was dropped was the strong feelings locally about the environmental impact.

The Government are committed to sustained long-term investment to improve local transport as a key element of our 10-year plan for transport. As the hon. Gentleman knows, in December 2000 we announced that £8.4 billion would be available to implement local transport plans in England over the next five years. The local transport settlement announced just before Christmas last year gave details of the third instalment of that funding, with £1.5 billion being made available in the current financial year. That funding will help to deliver the Government's vision of a high-quality transport network that meets people's needs and offers more choice to individuals, families, communities and businesses, such as those about which we have heard today.

We are investing £348 million in 2003–04 to enable local authorities to implement major transport projects across England. Those schemes will help to deliver the targets and outputs set out in our 10-year plan for transport by reducing the environmental impact of traffic, improving air quality by reducing emissions, reducing noise and reducing congestion in large urban areas.

We are providing the investment to enable authorities to deliver a huge range of small-scale transport projects, from safety schemes, bus priority measures and park-and-ride services through to schemes to encourage cycling and walking. I have seen at first hand the impact of many of those schemes on the communities that they affect.

I would like to turn now to the issue of today's debate—the A350 between Blandford and Shaftesbury. I will also say something about the investment that we have made in Dorset. In 2000–01, Dorset county council was allocated £0.9 million prior to the publication of our 10-year transport plan. That has risen in the current financial year to £3.247 million. I think that the hon. Gentleman alluded to that. It is a substantial rise—certainly a threefold rise. We have at the same time given the authority increased flexibility to determine its own priorities within its local transport allocations. With that greater local discretion we not unreasonably look to authorities to reprioritise their allocations to meet changing demands, including increases in the costs of individual schemes.

In addition to other schemes that I announced earlier, we gave provisional approval in November 2000 to the Weymouth relief road, which would reduce congestion and improve access to Weymouth and Portland.

The A350, as the hon. Gentleman said, is part of the primary route network linking Blandford to Warminster in the north. In the wider picture, it links the Poole-Bournemouth conurbation with Bristol and Bath and the M4 to the north. As part of the primary route network that route should be maintained to allow all vehicles to use it, to serve this part of Dorset and parts of the county beyond. However, the road is a local road and it is for Dorset county council to manage it.

As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, the A350 passes through attractive countryside, including Cranborne Chase and the West Wiltshire Downs area of outstanding natural beauty. The A350 between Blandford and Shaftesbury carries about 3,100 vehicles a day, of which 22 per cent. are heavy goods vehicles. Blandford is bypassed, but the road northwards to Shaftesbury is largely unimproved and passes through several villages. At points the road is steep and passes through some tight, narrow bends.

I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concerns about safety and the practical difficulties experienced by his constituents, given the number of heavy vehicles using the route.

Mr. Walter: I was perturbed by the figure that the Minister gave for the number of vehicles using the road, because even the Government office for the south-west acknowledges that the figure is in excess of 9,000 vehicles a day. That was what its representatives said when I had a meeting with them two weeks ago. Perhaps the Minister has picked a particular stretch to mention, but there are two roads, the A350 and the C13, which run parallel.

Mr. Jamieson: I was talking about the A350. The figure that I have been given is about 3,100. As the hon. Gentleman has questioned that, I shall request that we confirm the figure, and jot him a line about that. The figure for cars using the C13 is of course something in excess of that—about 5,000 a day. That may be where the hon. Gentleman's figure of 8,000 or 9,000 comes from.

No doubt matters would be worse without the parallel route of the C13, which I think is called the high road, locally. It carries fewer heavy goods vehicles than the A350, but I am advised that it takes about 5,200 vehicles a day, 10 per cent. of which are heavy goods vehicles. Heavy goods vehicles are advised not to use that route, because of the steepness of Melbury Abbas. That alternative route runs along the top of a prominent ridge that is visible for many miles, where there are fewer junctions than on the A350 and only one settlement—the Melbury Abbas settlement. Melbury Abbas is located at the northern end of the C13, at the bottom of the steep Spread Eagle hill, after which the road joins the A30 just east of Shaftesbury.

In the past, Dorset county council promoted a bypass for Melbury Abbas. That would provide the potential to remove traffic from the existing A350. I understand that for many years it was Dorset's wish to change the classification of the two roads following the implementation of that improvement, so that the C13 would become the A-road. However, the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that there are difficult environmental constraints around Melbury Abbas, which would make the delivery of an off-line improvement very difficult and probably exceedingly costly.

Not only is the landscape in the area unspoilt and designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty, but there are important wildlife sites nearby, including the Fontwell and Melbury Downs SSSI. Finally, an off-line improvement would be very expensive and would involve serious engineering challenges as it would have to rise up very steep gradients. I understand that, for those reasons, the scheme was withdrawn by Dorset county council some years ago and no longer appears in its structure plan nor in its local transport plan.

The hon. Gentleman knows that we decided that the A36-A46 to the north of this area should be detrunked, following our review of the trunk road network published in 1998. Local authorities in this part of the region have been actively supporting a study looking at the future of the A36-A46, which in part aims to ensure that additional traffic would not use the A350 in this part of Dorset. Dorset county council has been an active participant in that study, contributing both money and expertise. We welcome the support given to this study by Dorset and other authorities.

Dorset had hoped that the study might recommend a solution to the difficult traffic problems experienced on this route. I understand that it is disappointed that the local steering group has not been able to recommend that the A350 in this area should be improved. The study concluded, based on detailed analysis of the traffic, that the majority of cars and light vehicles on the route are local in origin and therefore it is appropriate that Dorset should recommend local solutions to deal with that traffic. I know that some say that this traffic comes from the port of Poole to south Wales and beyond. Our evidence is that that is simply not true. The majority of the heavy goods vehicles come from a wide area across the Poole-Bournemouth conurbation.

The information provided by our study should allow both Dorset county council and the south-west regional assembly to develop appropriate solutions to the problems south of Warminster. In view of the recognised environmental constraints on the A350 and the C13 it is probably right that we do not identify this route for significant or regionally significant improvements. However, we recognise that measures should be put in place to ensure that traffic levels are not increased along this corridor. As a result there is a need for a rapid review of the policies and proposals contained in the current Dorset structure plan to address this point, particularly the distribution of new housing.

If Dorset wishes to promote a scheme to improve the route or to remove heavy goods vehicles, it can do so through its local transport plan. Any such scheme would have to be appraised in the light of our current guidance. We will, of course, look carefully and sympathetically at any such proposal. I hope that that answers some of the hon. Gentleman's points. I cannot give him any great comfort, except to say that as it is a local road, many of the solutions will have to come through his local county council and the local transport plan scheme, which I hope can bring some comfort to those people living along the route.

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

Antisocial Behaviour

2 pm

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think that I have done so once or twice before and look forward to doing it again.

I am grateful to hon. Members for showing an interest. I apologise for the late change in subject, which may have disappointed some members of the audience; I know that it disappointed one right hon. Member, who had come prepared to speak on another subject. The change was made because a statement on entitlement cards is due in the foreseeable future, and it seemed a little pointless to have an Adjournment debate on the subject before then.

I chose community support officers as the substitute subject because Broxtowe, in common with many other constituencies, expects to receive six community support officers in the near future; the first are expected at the end of August. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary may correct me, but I believe that they have been active in a number of other areas for about 18 months. I know that, in general, early reports have been promising, but there have been various critical voices. Away from the argy-bargy of political debate, we are keen to draw on best practice. I spoke to a local inspector in north Broxtowe this morning, and he was keen that we should learn from this debate as to how other areas have found that CSOs can be most effectively deployed.

I worked hard to get CSOs deployed in Broxtowe, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) for his area. For those Members who have not had the inestimable pleasure of getting to know Greater Nottingham, the city is surrounded by three essentially suburban constituencies; Gedling, Broxtowe and Rushcliffe. They all contain a mixture of urban and semi-rural areas.

Although those Members familiar with Nottingham and its nightlife—I am sure that many Members go clubbing regularly—will know that there is a significant public order issue in Nottingham city when everyone spills out of the pubs and clubs. I have always stressed that the residential areas around the city also have a significant problem of antisocial behaviour. That needs to be addressed, not just for its own sake but because it affects the fear of crime.

In common with most parts of Britain, we in Broxtowe have experienced a decline in crime figures. As the Home Secretary remarked a few months ago, people do not believe that, because of a subtle reason. Most of us, fortunately, do not get burgled often enough to form a qualified opinion on whether the rates of burglary are going up or down. We read about horrific burglaries, rapes, muggings and so on in the newspapers, but we do not have a gut feeling as to the trend.

However, we have a gut feeling about the level of antisocial behaviour. In recent years, the level of antisocial behaviour has increased; there is no serious argument about that. People extrapolate from that; if they see youths on street corners getting drunk, shouting, being a nuisance to passers-by and breaking bus shelters, and those same people read in the tabloids about horrific crimes elsewhere in Britain, they assume that that crime is getting worse. They do not dare to go out at night, because they believe that the antisocial behaviour that they see in their area is translated into large numbers of muggers and other troublemakers.

The other day, I was talking to a chief inspector in Dorset, who said that he knows of elderly ladies in villages who do not dare to leave their homes because they are convinced that the streets are full of muggers. That is partly the effect of the press, but also reflects that extrapolation from antisocial behaviour.

It is not realistic to believe that if we have more police, the problem will be solved. As we know, we now have more police than at any time in British history—certainly in Nottinghamshire, and I think that that is also the case nationally—and that has not solved the problem. One of the reasons for that is that the police are trained on a broad front; to solve murders, to investigate rape allegations or to control riots. They are trained to deal with all the law-enforcement issues that may arise. Antisocial behaviour in the community is one among many of those law-enforcement issues, and competes for the attention of the police with more serious crimes.

No one would suggest that a youth standing on a street corner drinking beer and shouting at passers-by is a serious crime compared with burglary and assault. However, the problem is that if someone lives near that street corner and sees the same youth out there every night with 20 of his mates, but the police always give priority to burglary, assault and rape, that person, and the youths themselves, will get the impression that that aspect of the law is not being enforced.

In preparation for the debate, I have carried out a fair amount of research into the deployment of community support officers. They are less expensive to train than police officers because they do not undergo the full training, and so more of them can be recruited. However, the essential point about community support officers is that their role is designed to be locally focused. That means that they should be able, in the tradition of community policing, to identify the key trouble spots and the habitual troublemakers.

CSOs are trained in giving evidence, because one of the major problems has been to persuade people to give evidence and to give credible accounts to the courts about whom they have seen. CSOs are also trained in the low-level enforcement that is often missing in our towns and villages. Even if they are not trained in or expected to take action on the major, headline-grabbing crimes, their training enables them to specialise to a much greater extent than police officers.

We should accept that, initially, the police had some reservations about the appearance of CSOs, perhaps because they felt that CSOs were designed to be a sort of cheap police force that would eventually replace them. However, as the concept has evolved, I understand that that attitude has largely been superseded by straightforward pleasure that issues that could not be addressed in the past are now being addressed.

I have talked to a couple of the officers involved in policing Nottingham city, where there have been CSOs for some time. They said that the level of low-level antisocial behaviour was sufficient that they could not get to it. Every day, they look at a long list of things that

they should follow up, and it is simply a relief if additional people can specialise in dealing with such behaviour and deter it.

There can be substantial drops in crime. For instance, in Kimberley in my area, crime is down by 55 per cent. in the last year. It is important to reinforce drops of that order with a strong message about antisocial behaviour. If people see that antisocial behaviour is being curbed, and if the figures show that the numbers of burglaries, muggings and so on have fallen substantially, they will feel safer in their communities. That is one of the most precious things that any Government and any political class, which is what we all are, can provide for their citizens. Indeed, the original contract between Government and the governed is that we will provide security of the immediate environment.

I am extremely keen to see CSOs in Broxtowe and spreading round the country, but I have several questions to explore. First, what experience has there been elsewhere of how CSOs are most effectively deployed? Obviously, one option is to send them out with experienced police officers. I imagine that that would be a natural introduction to their time in service. People should not just hand them a map and say, "Go and sort out this community." To make sense, presumably there must come a point at which they can operate independently in an area. I should be interested to hear about experience as to how quickly that point comes.

Secondly, when will a full assessment of the impact of CSOs be made? When I asked about that at Home Office questions yesterday, my hon. Friend the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety said that estimates of the impact of CSOs on antisocial behaviour had not yet been made. Given that they are a new concept, I hope that such an assessment will be made at some point. I would be grateful if the Under-Secretary guided us on when we might expect that.

I am interested to hear about experience as to how large a community a CSO can optimally serve. Broxtowe is made up of numerous towns and villages, and it is unrealistic to expect that every little clutch of streets will get its own CSO. Obviously, that will not happen with six officers, but the alternatives are for, say, a pair of CSOs to be responsible for a huge area covering 25,000 people, or to concentrate on a small area where it is known that there is quite a lot of trouble and hope to get to the other areas later when the trouble has been dealt with. There is always a risk of displacing trouble.

It would be helpful to know what, according to experience, was an appropriate area for CSOs to deal with. It should not be so small that they are wasting their time or so large that they are accused, as the police traditionally are, of never being seen. When we get the six officers, the police authority and the local council would be grateful for more guidance on what has happened elsewhere.

The next question is the extent to which the role of a CSO differs from that of the community police. We all talk derisively about the need to get away from the "Dixon of Dock Green" concept, but a lot of people think back wistfully to those days and would like a beat bobby to come round every few hours. The police in Nottinghamshire worked out that a beat policeman apprehends an offender every 24 years. In contrast, if officers are deployed on following and studying the habits of known repeat offenders, they arrest roughly two a week. That is a dramatic contrast. Most people, including myself, feel that the presence of beat officers deters crime. However, the difference between arresting two a week and one every 24 years shows that we must concede that the police have a case for deploying their most experienced officers on chasing routine repeat offenders and ensuring that they are caught as soon as they return to crime.

We must balance that work with a visible presence, and the police cannot do everything. I hope that community support officers will fill that role and give people the sense that, as well as the most experienced officers chasing hardened criminals, there is a local presence and somebody whom they can talk to informally. As MPs, all of us are familiar with the constituent who says, "Well, you know, I don't like to say so, but most of the trouble in this area is caused by the people in No. 17", and when asked why they do not report them, they reply, "I don't dare." An effective community support officer would know that to be the case and frequently would be seen in the vicinity of No. 17. People would know that an eye was being kept on their activities.

The community support officers do not replace the current beat patrols. We all know that the police are stretched, but every community in Broxtowe has a beat sergeant and a team of constables as, I assume, most other parts of the country do. I expect community support officers to work with beat constables and sergeants, and it would be helpful if we knew more about how that co-operation has worked in other areas. We must try to ensure that CSOs are not used by the police as dogsbodies to do things that they cannot be bothered with, and that they are not seen as competitors. The worst case would be if one person reported a crime and did not get a response whereas someone else found that the police and the CSO followed it up in succession.

There must be close co-operation and I want to talk about how that works in practice. What is the typical profile of a CSO, and whom should we encourage to apply? We all have constituents who say, "If they gave me the chance I'd sort things out", and we have tried asking them to become a special policeman. As a rule, they ask how much the pay is, we tell them it is not a lot and the interest diminishes. However, the more serious people who say that might be interested in applying for the CSO posts.

I shall not read aloud the job advertisement, but it would be helpful to know, for instance, whether a community support officer has a slightly older age profile due to the nature of the work, which is unlikely to be as strenuous and physically demanding as that of a policeman controlling a riot. However, the police could be looking for young people who might move on to the regular police force. That raises the question of the long-term career structure.

When I talked with Les Kominiak, the superintendent responsible for police in southern Nottinghamshire, he said that many CSOs, having gained extensive

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experience in community policing, would be likely to move on to become fully fledged police officers. That is an option and an objective that he would like to be realised, although he would like people to stay in the job, with CSOs becoming more experienced and having a career and reward structure that reflects that experience. Do the pension arrangements for CSOs reflect those of the police force or are there separate arrangements?

To return to the original theme of the debate, I should like to draw on the response yesterday to my question about the powers of detention for CSOs. Interestingly, the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety replied that if CSOs have the power to detain people for half an hour, as they do in some areas, it is easier to identify those with whom they are dealing.

I shall not anticipate the statement, which we know is not too many months away, but this seems to be an area in which ID cards could make a significant difference. I am aware that the Government's view is that, although ID cards might become universal, it should not be compulsory for people to carry them to identify themselves when requested to do so.

The overwhelming majority of the people to whom I speak are extremely enthusiastic about ID cards. They feel that if somebody is behaving suspiciously, it should be possible for the police to ask that person to identify themselves; not for routine checks of the kind that became notorious in Brixton, but in cases of documented suspicious behaviour. There is more than one way to identify oneself and I do not say that people should be required to carry ID cards, but we should make it a condition that if a CSO or the police ask someone to identify themselves and if that person can produce their ID card, that would settle the matter. If they could produce another kind of ID and the police or the CSO were satisfied, that would be fine too.

I accept our commitment not to require people to carry ID cards at all times, but CSOs and the police should have the power to ask people to identify themselves if they are behaving suspiciously. Let me give an example; a CSO on Beeston high road sees someone wandering along at 11 o'clock at night, feeling the doors of buildings. It is not illegal to feel the door of a building to see whether it is open. If the officer goes up to him, as he might well, and asks what he is doing, and he says, "I am thinking of writing an article for the local paper on local security and I am doing some research to see how many doors are open", the officer can point out that what he is doing is a bit dodgy and might be misinterpreted, but he cannot arrest him for it. Nor can he ask him to identify himself.

The community support officer might walk on round the corner and the next morning it might be reported that a shop has been broken into, but it would not have been possible for the officer to have deterred that by identifying that it was John Smith—or Oliver Letwin, David Blunkett or whatever figure one might think of—whom he interviewed on the street the previous night.

If I were considering such a crime—although I do not do so frequently—and were stopped by a CSO, if I was identified unambiguously, which an identity card would do, I would probably decide to call it a night and go back to bed. I might try again another night, but that would have acted as a deterrent. However, if I could just say that my name was, say, Letwin, it would be less of a deterrent. I might still be a bit worried that I might be recognised, but if I were wearing a hood and generally slickly dressed I would probably feel that it was quite likely that I would get away with it. When we come to debate ID cards in the coming months, I ask the Under-Secretary to consider seriously—although we should not go back on the pledge not to require people to carry them all the time—allowing the police to require people to identify themselves by whatever means they think appropriate.

If we made that obligatory, we would also need to require the police to log all such requests, with an indication of why they considered the behaviour suspicious. We must avoid a return to the stop-and-search culture that prevailed in Brixton, which ultimately led to riots. Basically, if someone was young and black, they were stopped. The Information Commissioner would have to be empowered to inspect the records of police forces to see whether any stood out as having an unusually high level of such inquiries; if necessary, the commissioner could look at individual records.

We all talk about too much bureaucracy, and a balance must be struck. If we get to the point where we allow community support officers and the police to require identification of some kind, we ought to document the circumstances under which that takes place so that we can verify that it is not being misused.

I return to co-operation between police and CSOs. There have been some press reports of forces in which CSOs have been frequently reported for apparently minor infringements of discipline. One interpretation of that is that officers have felt a degree of resentment towards the newcomers and have been eager to pick them up on any little infraction that, in a regular officer, would have passed almost without comment.

On the other hand, in the Metropolitan police in particular, reports are that co-operation has been very good and that the regular officers have greeted the reinforcements with some enthusiasm. So that we can benefit from the good examples rather than from any bad ones, I should be grateful if the Under-Secretary elaborated on what kind of training and advice needs to be given to new CSOs and existing officers to ensure that co-operation is optimal and that they see each other as partners rather than rivals.

At Home Office Question Time yesterday, the Minister of State said that the power to detain people for 30 minutes was proving successful in a number of areas. The issue is important when it comes to the credibility of CSOs. We all hear anecdotally of eight-year-olds who can quote the Human Rights Act 1998. If it became generally known that CSOs could tell someone off, call in the regular police and give evidence against people, but could not detain people until the police turned up, the more daring troublemakers would exploit that.

I am aware that there are reservations about allowing a new group of people the power of detention, but 30 minutes is not excessive. I was stopped for exceeding a speed limit the other day; it was a fair cop. I apologised and it took roughly half an hour to fill out the relevant forms, which I interpreted as part of the punishment. In

our everyday lives, most of us are accustomed to incurring half-hour delays because of the maintenance of public order or traffic problems. If someone gives a CSO reason to suspect that they are having a serious antisocial impact on their environment, it is not an excessive infringement of liberty to allow the CSO to detain that person for 30 minutes.

More cynical people might say that 30 minutes is not enough because the police normally take three hours to turn up, so CSOs would hang about for half an hour and then have to let the person go. Well, that is not the experience in my area. Sometimes the police reckon that the criminal has already escaped and that an urgent response will not change anything, so they turn up a day or two later, which causes irritation. However, when the police genuinely believe that an offender is still on the premises, they arrive quickly.

It is a basic requirement of the co-operation between CSOs and the police that we ensure that if CSOs have the power to detain people for 30 minutes, the police will virtually never fail to turn up within that time.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): The hon. Gentleman is touching on some matters to which I will return, but I want to challenge him about the issue of detention, which caused grave concern when the Police Reform Bill was in Committee.

As the hon. Gentleman described, the police have to give priority to burglary, robbery, rape and murder—the serious crimes—and CSOs are filling in on the less serious crimes. If a CSO detains a lout—I think that that was the word that the hon. Gentleman used—for an antisocial act in a large geographic constituency such as mine or that of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), and the police are called out to a robbery or car chase, after 30 minutes the CSO has to say to the young hooligan, "Well, no copper has turned up. I am going to have to let you go." What does that do for the credibility of the system?

Dr. Palmer: The hon. Gentleman is right; that is an essential feature of the arrangement. The expectation should be that in the overwhelming majority of cases the police turn up within 30 minutes. If that is not possible because of the intensive levels of rape and pillage in Somerton and Frome, for instance—without wanting to trivialise crime in that constituency—we need to consider whether the period needs to be longer, or whether a different power is needed to require the offender to come to the police station. I want to raise that issue with the Under-Secretary. I would be interested to know whether we find that in the pilot areas it is possible for the police to arrive within 30 minutes.

I make a distinction between the situation that I described at the start, to which the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) referred, and the one that he has just outlined. A hard-working police officer may well be reluctant to turn out for a slightly nebulous report of someone shouting in the street, or a report that someone has been seen throwing bottles. By the time he turns up, the offender might have escaped, and the offence may have been exaggerated anyway. If he has a burglary to follow up, he would put the first issue on one side.

However, if the same hard-working police officer has a burglary to follow up but gets a call from the CSO saying that he has an offender standing in front of him, temporarily detained and ready to be arrested, he would be much more motivated to deal with the situation. If the police feel that CSOs are delivering offenders into their grasp for immediate arrest, that is a very different situation with regard to priority from the question of simply dealing with antisocial behaviour. There seems to be a strong prima facie case for the argument that the power of detention is desirable. Whether 30 minutes is enough, I do not know; I should be grateful for the Under-Secretary's insights into the experience in other areas.

Without wanting to stray outside the limits of today's debate, we should also address the broader question of freedom compared with the crime enforcement carried out by community support officers. That challenge was raised in Hugo Young's article today, in which he suggests that the instincts of Government Members, such as myself, are illiberal. He suggests that where we have a choice between reducing crime and the fear of crime and reducing freedom, we invariably choose against freedom. I am paraphrasing, but that was the substance of his indictment. We have to take such a suggestion seriously because there comes a point where the considerations of freedom override the considerations of crime prevention.

We can all suggest extremes. If we were to intern all teenagers, we would end teenage crime; I have constituents who would favour that solution. However, a long way short of that comes a point where most of us would feel that we were interfering too much in the normal exercise of everyday life. When we consider the tools that CSOs might use, many of them are individually controversial such as evidence from CCTV cameras, evidence from DNA or identity cards. When we examine those, each can easily be justified on the grounds that the benefits of greater community safety outweigh the risks, but there is a slightly more serious case to answer when they are all put together.

Singapore is the most concrete example with which we are familiar. It is widely admired by tourists for the law-abiding behaviour of its citizens, the absence of chewing-gum on the streets and so on. People in that country know that they will be arrested and thrown into prison for offences. Most people believe that Singapore, admirable though it is, perhaps goes a little too far.

We are on solid ground with community support officers. Whereas we must be careful that the gravity of more serious crimes does not lead us into cutting corners in dealing with crime, for the relatively trivial offences of antisocial behaviour, it is widely perceived that there is a huge gap between what people would like to see in their community and what they actually see. My perception from talking to many constituents about the issue is that people would accept a significant increase in surveillance—I deliberately use that loaded word—if it meant a significant reduction in antisocial behaviour. Part of such surveillance is the presence of community support officers who can work with the community to identify the troublemakers.

We all realise that most offences are caused by a small number of people. A member of my own family burned down a beach hut when she was a teenager. I come from a respectable family, whose members do not often do that sort of thing. She went to a beach party with a group of about 20 people. When they got a bit cold,

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someone asked, "Why don't we set fire to the hut?" Everyone laughed, and they set fire to it. My relative did not suggest it, but she did nothing to stop it.

We are all familiar with the idea of the community ringleader who causes trouble. Part of the job of community support officers is to know who those ringleaders are, to make them know that they are known and that an eye is being kept on them and to reinforce the confidence of others in the community that supervision is being maintained and that something will be done if they report acts, or even planned acts, of antisocial behaviour. Community support officers will also enable people like my relative to have the courage to say, "No, that might get us into trouble. A CSO might come along."

I wish to give the crowd of hon. Members who wish to speak on this debate a chance to speak, so I propose to conclude my remarks in the next few minutes. Communities will welcome the community support officers and are anticipating the role that they will play to the extent that we must be careful that we do not raise expectations too high, as community support officers will not be supermen or women any more than anyone else.

However, reinforcement by people who are based in the community and who are familiar with its troublespots and troublemakers has the potential to make a significant contribution to making our communities feel that we as a political class are delivering the secure environment that is the basic part of the social contract. Those things will be achieved only if we use the CSOs optimally, if we avoid friction with the regular police, if we ensure that the regular police and the CSOs are trained to work together and if we draw on the best practice from around the country. I hope that the areas, including Broxtowe, that are about to get CSOs for the first time can draw on the experience of others.

I am grateful for the chance to speak about the issue at greater length than I had anticipated and look forward to the rest of the debate.

2.45 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I congratulate the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) on securing this debate and the one that he had intended to have, both of which concern pertinent subjects. I am sure that his suggestion that the Palmers are the scourge of the Nottinghamshire countryside with their speeding and arson was inadvertent. I am also sure that he inadvertently mentioned identity cards. His remarks were nevertheless illuminating because his example suggested that the substantive evidence that caused the officer to request the person's identity was that the person was out at night and was wearing a hood. We might have explored that argument had we been dealing with ID cards.

Dr. Palmer: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman so early in his speech, but I said that the person involved was trying the doors of shops along the high road.

Mr. Heath: I did not understand that the person was trying doors, which is an offence. Perhaps I misunderstood the hon. Gentleman, for which I apologise.

Let us deal with the substance of the hon. Gentleman's contribution because the subject is important. There is a lot of common ground, despite the differences that sometimes occur in debate. It is common ground that antisocial behaviour is a serious problem in all sorts of communities and in all sorts of ways. During the proceedings on the Criminal Justice Bill, the hon. Gentleman's county colleague, the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), suggested that the mean streets of his constituency were the epicentre of crime in the country. I must say that that is not necessarily the case. Small village communities, such as those that I represent, market towns and the big conurbations all have problems with antisocial behaviour. Our constituents are rightly worried by antisocial behaviour and want solutions to be found.

The importance of the patrol function is the second area of common ground, and the hon. Gentleman spent some time discussing it. He rightly said that for a good many years chief police officers have taken the view that the patrol function is a marginal policing activity because it does not catch and convict criminals, and the evidence suggests that that is the case. That does not undermine the importance of the patrol function in keeping the peace, which is an important part of policing.

The patrol function does three things. It deters—it is possible to overstate that point—and undoubtedly acts to reassure communities that there is a police presence among them, which is desperately important. It is a truism that the fear of crime is almost as debilitating to a community as crime itself. It is appalling that members of the community, who are often elderly, fear even in a village to go out after nightfall because they have read lurid reports in tabloid newspapers that they are about to be knocked over the head by a ruffian. The fact that that is not the case is neither here nor there. They have a real belief that it is the case, and the presence of a uniformed officer is therefore important.

I agree with the hon. Member for Broxtowe that a patrol officer provides intelligence that feeds into deterring and investigating crime effectively. We have lost the direct communication between our police and communities that allows the police to understand what is happening in the community and respond to it, to know the individuals concerned and speak to them and to pick up on the indications of responsibility for crime or impending crime at an early stage. That loss is important.

In my involvement with police forces, I have always stressed the importance of intelligent patrol—making sure that uniformed officers are there at the right time and place to provide the maximum reassurance and deterrence. That means appearing on pensions day at a sub-post office in a small village, and being there at chucking-out time in the middle of a market town on Friday or Saturday night. Those are the times when people need to see a uniformed presence among them and working with them. There is broad agreement that community support officers have a role to play and that they are a plus rather than a minus.

More generally, and without wanting to sound too analytical or philosophical, there are three classes of people. There are, first, core criminals, about whom the community support officers will do nothing. They are the 20 per cent. of those charged with crimes who

commit 80 per cent. of crime. They have an extraordinarily high degree of recidivism, and a propensity for committing crimes almost irrespective of the punishment or deterrent set. Community support officers will not have an effect in that area.

The second class is the vast majority of law-abiding citizens, who we often forget, and classify—as the hon. Gentleman did in his humorous aside about locking up all teenagers—as a problem. Very often the view comes through that teenagers are a problem. They are not a problem; some teenagers are a problem, just like some 80-year olds are a problem. We do not do well when we class all young people as the reason for antisocial behaviour and place subsequently inappropriate restrictions on them.

The third class is those involved in antisocial behaviour and petty crime. That concerns the one-off criminal and rowdyism, which can be addressed, deterred and prevented. That is where community support officers, along with a range of sanctions and measures, can have an effect.

One of my worries with the Government—the worry is not new—is that they have addressed the problems of crime time and time again and have introduced 660 new laws during their lifetime. They have been less effective at dealing with the other part of the equation as set out by the Prime Minister in his famous dictum on the causes of crime. Were we to do a lot more about the environment, lighting, facilities for kids, skateboarding parks, recreational opportunities and the effective use of schools, we would reduce antisocial behaviour. Instead we blame anyone who happens to find themselves in a bus shelter at night because there is nothing else to do. We have not addressed some of those community and societal matters with sufficient energy and resources, so we have opened the way for more serious crime.

I was interested to read a series of reports in *The Guardian* in the last week or so—other hon. Members may have read them—one of which focused on Bristol, a city in which I have some interest, as I was once chairman of the Avon and Somerset police authority. One of our great successes when I was chairman related to the serious criminals who formed the local gangs and were at the head of the drugs trade and every other sort of serious crime in Bristol—the Aggies, as they called themselves. We had a list of 10 top criminals and we had all of them behind bars. That was a huge success for the Avon and Somerset constabulary.

However, the consequence was that a few years down the track those same communities found themselves in the presence of a new breed of gang; the yardies came in and took over the territory. Resources had not been put into putting up barriers against that new invasion of criminal, so we had simply replaced one set of criminals with another. The Aggies have now finished their prison terms and there is gang warfare on the streets of Bristol. That is appalling, and very difficult for the police to deal with.

I say that not because I expect community support officers to do something about that level of crime, but to underline the need to put resources behind the front line of patrol and policing in order to give the community the strength to resist the activities of criminals. There is now a new breed of officer and, although we have some criticisms of what the Government have developed, there will be advantages to community support officers having a common status with other uniformed presences, so that they can work together under common powers and commands, rather than in separate areas.

We understand the Police Federation's criticisms. It is worried that the measures simply allow policing on the cheap and are a substitute for providing police officers. I do not think that those criticisms are entirely justified, but the view of professional police officers is understandable.

We need to understand that community support officers are not police officers. They have a different function and are working at a different level. As the Under-Secretary's predecessor, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), said, they extend the police family—a rather homely phrase, but it expresses what has happened. It is important that we do not expect them to do what they cannot and are not trained to do. As the hon. Member for Broxtowe says, that would undermine their function and their abilities.

It is also important that we select and train CSOs properly for what they do. There is evidence that that has not taken place in some of the forces currently taking on community support officers. I do not want to exaggerate, and I certainly share some of the concerns that the hon. Member for Broxtowe expressed about the experience in the Metropolitan force particularly, but let us be absolutely sure that CSOs are able and prepared to do the job that we want them to do.

One particular power under the Anti-social Behaviour Bill that gives me great cause for concern is that of dispersal. The Under-Secretary knows that we have taken exception to giving that power to CSOs, not least because the Association of Chief Police Officers is worried about the power in itself. I quote from the deputy chief constable of Northamptonshire, Mr. Whitely, who has responsibility for the matter for ACPO:

> "The initial reaction from forces suggests that it would not be enthusiastically used in the operational environment. The arguments against centre around street culture and the likely impact within socially deprived and minority areas. Such a power could, potentially lead to confrontation, disengagement and isolation of some elements of the communities".

If ACPO are worried about that happening with properly trained fully competent police officers, the risk of it happening with someone who is not as competent, trained or in the same position is even greater. Will the Government think again?

We should accept that community support officers can play a role in extending the patrol function, particularly to areas that would not otherwise be covered. They are not a substitute for extra, omni-competent police officers or properly trained special constables. They are also not a substitute for a category that I have wanted to see developed but that the Government have shown only occasional interest, which is that of retained, fully trained officers, analogous to our retained firefighters but giving an extra police presence in rural areas. Community support

[Mr. Heath]

officers have their place, but we must understand their limitations as well as the expectations that could so easily be put on their shoulders.

3 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak. I must admit that when we started, I did not believe that it would be at 3 o'clock, and I am anxious not to squeeze the Under-Secretary out of her time to reply.

I echo the congratulations to the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) on securing the debate. I am less sure that I congratulate him on the subject that he eventually chose, because I suspect—ungenerous as I may be—that the heavy hand of Government rested on his shoulder and they said that they did not want a debate on ID cards 48 hours before a statement. Nevertheless, community support officers and antisocial behaviour are important, and the hon. Gentleman addressed several issues.

Dr. Palmer: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I want to place on record that I was asked specifically by the Speaker's Office whether any pressure had been put on me to change the subject. I confirm today what I confirmed to the Speaker, that no pressure was put on me. I was simply told that there would be a statement on ID cards soon, and it seemed appropriate to me to change the debate.

Mr. Paice: I entirely accept the hon. Gentleman's explanation; I simply claim in aid my natural cynicism after 16 years in this place.

The common ground that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) mentioned is shared with my party as well. As a Back Bencher, the Under-Secretary spent some time in Committee on the Anti-social Behaviour Bill until she found herself propelled to the Front Bench. That happened before the Bill finished its progress, so she will have seen the issue from both sides. I am sure that she will agree that there was widespread agreement about the problem across the Committee. The disagreement was on the proposed solutions.

There is also common ground on the role of non-police officers in helping to address the problem of antisocial behaviour. From the outset of debate on what is now the Police Reform Act 2002, we emphasised that we want and believe in non-police officers aiding the police in their duties. We have seen neighbourhood and traffic wardens and the development of street patrols, and last week I was in Wandsworth, where the borough council employ a lot of street wardens.

Such people will have a vital role to play, and the area of debate—it is no more than that—is about giving non-police officers a range of police powers. As the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said, the Anti-social Behaviour Bill will increase the range of those powers. He mentioned one or two, and I will not go into the detail of them all, but it seems premature to extend the range of CSO powers when, as has been said, we will not receive the first evaluation of how the initial tranche of CSOs has settled down until September.

There is a more important aspect, which is that the more that the range of CSO powers is extended, the more the distinction between a CSO and a real police officer—a proper copper—is blurred.

I shall now discuss the financial aspects. I am sure that the Under-Secretary will claim it as a great success that the 27 police authorities that bid for CSOs in the first round wanted them despite the doom-mongers—among whom I include myself—who said that there was no demand for CSOs. However, the way in which the Government did it was bound to create demand, because putting in bids for CSOs was the only way that police forces would get any money at all. I remain of the view that if the Government had simply put that money into the policing "pot" and said that police forces could have either police officers or CSOs, most chief constables would have spent that money on police officers rather than CSOs. However, they were not given that option, and it is hardly surprising that there was demand, because it gave forces the opportunity to increase their overall resources.

It will be interesting to see the results of the evaluation in September. Although it is difficult to be precise, it appears that the pay of CSOs is almost in the same league as the bottom of the pay scale for a police constable. The starting pay for a constable is £18,666. I suggest that not many CSOs are earning considerably less than that, so the cost saving is probably much more marginal than the Government had originally anticipated. However, there is a financial saving in the training of CSOs; their training takes three weeks rather than 19 weeks.

Equally seriously, there are no national standards for CSO training—the training is all carried out in individual forces—whereas police officers are trained according to national standards and through Centrex. I am concerned that we are spending almost as much on paying CSOs and investing considerably fewer resources in their training, while extending the range of police powers that they are given. There seems to be a disjunction between the approaches that are being taken.

According to the Government's press release of 2 May, the next tranche of CSOs will receive only 50 per cent. funding. It remains to be seen whether the demand for CSOs will continue when forces are required to find their own resources to complement Government money.

I now turn to the issue of what I call neighbourhood policing, a concept that was central to the comments made by the hon. Member for Broxtowe. He mentioned apprehending a criminal once every 24 years. Policing, however, is not just about apprehending criminals; it is about ensuring that we all live in an orderly society, and that crime is prevented. In the ideal world, the police would prevent all crime and there would be no criminals, but although we would all love to inhabit such a world, we never will.

However, I strongly agree with the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome that neighbourhood policing has a vital role to play not only in deterring criminals and reassuring the population, but in preventing crime by low-level intelligence gathering in the community of which it is part. Neighbourhood policing also has a role to play in bringing communities together, and in

enhancing the physical environment by ensuring, as in New York—the broken windows theory—that things are done; that burnt-out cars and vomit on the street are cleared away, and that broken windows are repaired. If one broken window is left broken, the following week the next window will be broken. Action to prevent that is part of addressing the problems of antisocial behaviour and crime, and is a vital role for neighbourhood policing.

What concerns me is that if we expect CSOs to be playing that role—I believe that that was the nub of the argument put forward by the hon. Member for Broxtowe, and it is certainly the Government's contention—that has two implications. First, we are saying that we have downgraded the role of neighbourhood policing and that it is not a job for a full-blown police officer but a slightly inferior role for a community support officer. That sends out all the wrong messages about neighbourhood policing.

In contrast, I think that neighbourhood policing should be a distinct, positive career path in the police service that needs to be enhanced. It should involve proper career prospects and there should be much less abstraction from neighbourhood policing for the "fire brigade" work of dealing with crime. The risk of using CSOs as replacements for neighbourhood police officers in that role is that we diminish rather than enhance the role of neighbourhood policing.

Secondly, although I may have unwittingly slightly undermined this point in my earlier comments about cost, I have a fundamental concern if CSOs are cheaper than police officers; if they are not, I cannot see why we have embarked on the scheme. I suggested that the saving may not be as great as was originally expected. I can foresee a day when a Chancellor says to a Home Secretary, "Well, I accept that you may want some more bodies in uniform on the street, but you can have 5,000 CSOs or 2,000 or 3,000 police officers. Which is it to be?" We would thus begin the gradual slide of reducing the professionalism of the police force. That would be a very serious trend to start.

I look forward to the evaluation results in September on the various aspects that I have described. The hon. Member for Broxtowe accepted my intervention on detention, and I am grateful to him for that. That gave rise to a great deal of debate during the Committee stage of the Police Reform Bill. I remain of the view that I expressed in my intervention. I am pleased that the Government accepted the need for some pilots to see how the scheme would work, and to see whether my worst fears were realised or unfounded or, as I suspect, somewhere in between; but I think that there are potentially real problems with the use of detention.

Following the hon. Gentleman for a moment down his other side-route on the role of identity and the ability to detain someone while checking their identity, he quite rightly demonstrated that unless someone is required to carry an identity card, one of the fundamental benefits that the public perceive from having them is completely destroyed. If one does not have to carry a card, one cannot be required to produce it. To tell someone that they must bring it to a police station in the next few days, as with a driving licence, is frankly absurd. If someone has given the wrong identity, the fact that they do not turn up at the police station can never be followed up. It is complete nonsense to suggest that, although I have read that that is in part of the proposals.

Another issue is that this time next year there will be 25 countries in the EU, so the citizens of 24 other countries will have the free right to move around this country with just the passports of their native country. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and everyone else knows how easy it is to obtain a forged passport, particularly from some countries either in or about to become part of the EU. That, too, undermines whatever technology may be involved. If someone just produces a Portuguese passport and says that they are a Portuguese citizen—whether they are or not—they will have complied with the necessary legislation. However, the power of detention will not have achieved the fundamental objective—to ascertain or verify the identity of the individual who has been detained.

I shall not detain the Chamber much longer, because I want the Under-Secretary to have the opportunity to respond. I conclude with a completely different point on antisocial behaviour. It is on an issue that we did not debate on Report when debating the Bill because of the timetable, but the Government introduced a new clause on it. It is the problem of travellers. Although I strongly welcome the fact that the Government responded to the pressure that I and others put on them in Committee, I hope that they will consider the matter carefully and that the Under-Secretary will have a chance this afternoon to explain a little more of the background and why they have introduced their amendments to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. Requiring alternative sites to be available before the police use the powers that the Government are giving them drives a coach and horses through the enforceability of that legislation.

The Bill will be debated in the other place, and I am sure that their lordships will probe the Government on that, but it is a crucial issue. The Government clearly want to address the problem, and I respect them and congratulate them on their enthusiasm for doing so. But I am not sure that they have not unwittingly created a loophole that will completely nullify the benefit of the Bill.

I am grateful for an opportunity to address the Chamber on this issue, which will not go away. We look forward to the conclusions of the first evaluation. The best thing that I can say about CSOs at this stage is that the jury is out. We look forward to seeing how they settle down. I suspect that they are here to stay in one guise or another, but it is essential to study how they are settling down and how their powers are used if we are to make the most of their role in helping the police to combat crime.

3.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Caroline Flint): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) on securing the debate, which is on an important issue. All hon. Members present will recognise that antisocial behaviour and the changing ways in which it affects our communities is probably one of the top two issues, if not the top issue, that they come across in their postbags. It has changed the face of law enforcement and the issues

[Caroline Flint]

that police officers have to deal with. I remember watching "Dixon of Dock Green" as a child. I was brought up in what seemed a rather happier time in policing, notwithstanding the fact that police officers also had to deal with serious criminal issues many years ago. Some of that has not changed, but other things certainly have.

It is increasingly recognised that certain crimes, because of their nature and seriousness, demand the attention of fully trained police officers. Indeed, that was reflected in the debate and acknowledged by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber. Antisocial behaviour is not necessarily less serious. If the antisocial behaviour that starts in communities as an irritant is not checked, the people responsible can turn into the full-blown criminals whom our police officers have to deal with.

We must recognise that we need multi-skilled teams. This is not only about community support officers, but about working with local authorities and the health service. That is certainly the case in relation to drugs in the area that I cover. It is increasingly important that the police work alongside drug action teams and other people in that sphere. It is also important to work with community organisations, whether tenants and residents associations, neighbourhood watch or community partnerships. I was told a few weeks ago by a senior police officer in Bristol that where there has been serious crime on the streets, intensive police action has been required to deal with it and to reclaim the streets. The neighbourhoods and the community must be left strong enough to withhold future crime waves by gangs or whatever.

Mr. Heath: The Under-Secretary is right about the point that I made in my speech. Will she accept that dealing with serious crime such as we have in Bristol causes the abstraction of officers from the rest of the police authority area? In our part of the world, for instance, the whole of Somerset has lost officers because they are dealing with the gangs in Bristol. As a result, we are all losers.

Caroline Flint: I am pleased to inform the hon. Gentleman that crime is decreasing in Avon and Somerset. The support from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and the police standards unit has demonstrated that they have got a grip on their performance issues. Indeed, recent data show positive reductions in recorded crime. Of course, at local level—at force level—it is up to senior police officers to consider the situation throughout their communities and to decide where best to place their resources. There will be short-term and medium-term operations to deal with that, but it is important to recognise that different types of crime or activity, including antisocial behaviour, require different responses.

My major point is that we are trying to build capacity and strength in relation to communities. That is about policing, but it is also about building community partnerships so that local people can take back control of their neighbourhoods and so that a handful of families do not hold whole communities to ransom.

CSOs come into their own in relation to police presence. I do not agree with the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) who said that it is just about police forces saying, "Well, that's where the money is. We're going to put in to have that presence in our community." There is demand from communities for that sort of support and those resources in their immediate neighbourhoods and that is reflected in the number of bids to increase the provision.

Mr. Paice: Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Caroline Flint: I want to make some progress because I have only a short time in which to speak, but I will return to the hon. Gentleman if I have a few minutes at the end.

The primary role of CSOs is to provide high-visibility patrols in our communities and deal with lower level crime and antisocial behaviour. CSOs are fully integrated into forces, based in police stations and supervised by police officers. That goes to the heart of the point about teams and good relationships. The police are in control of the process. CSOs complement police officers to provide a better service. We are increasing numbers of police officers to record levels, and, at the same time, we are considering ways to improve the provision of police services to our communities by using mixed-skill teams of police officers and CSOs.

CSOs are not policing on the cheap. Their attributes—a low level of power and targeted training suited to their patrol function—lend them to being better at permanent community patrols. Unlike police officers, whose extensive skills base means that they are likely to be regularly abstracted from their core patrol functions, CSOs are likely to spend long periods without being removed from patrol, acting as the eyes and ears of the police service.

In the communities that I represent—I am talking not about a major town, but about satellite communities—police officers work in partnership with CSOs, with the local inspector. Police officers are still visible, but recognising the different contributions to different levels of crime and nuisance is important.

CSOs support police officers. They are fully trained and empowered by the Police Reform Act 2002 to undertake tasks such as staffing security cordons, carrying out administration at roadblocks or dealing with abandoned cars. Many such tasks do not utilise the full range of skills, or the training, of regular police officers. We hope that CSOs will free up police time so that the police can concentrate on tasks that can best be done by fully trained police officers.

On deployment, my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe mentioned the size and nature of communities and asked how large a community was. Those are questions for chief officers to determine in consultation with members of their crime and disorder reduction partnerships and in relation to other patrols available in the area. Deployment should be consistent with the application of the national intelligence model, which will ensure the more efficient allocation of resource, where they are needed. We cannot put a blueprint on deployment from on high, at national level. Actively engaging with community partnerships, community

safety officers on local authorities and others will determine how best to fit patrols and resources to local needs.

On evaluation, it has been mentioned that we are learning from the process. We are seeing good results and there has been anecdotal evidence about how well supported CSOs are. Chief officers have had the power to designate their staff as CSOs since December last year, so the process is still young, but we have come a long way in seven months. For instance, 1,390 CSOs have already been recruited and a further 1,233 are to be part-funded by the Home Office in this financial year. There will be only five forces not employing CSOs by the end of this financial year.

Despite being in the early stages of the project, we are receiving lots of informal evidence from forces, local authorities, local papers and Members of Parliament that indicates that CSOs are having a significant impact on local communities. I am pleased to say that several forces have reported significant reductions in crime in areas in which CSOs are patrolling.

Anecdotal evidence is encouraging, but we need a more formal evaluation of the impact of CSOs in order to ascertain what works best. All forces that take on CSOs will evaluate their performance, and we will issue guidance to help to standardise the information across the 27 first-round forces. That is important because we want the results to stand up to rigour and provide an evidential base for further developments. We also want to be sure about best practice and that what we are recommending to other forces can be applied in those forces and other communities. It is important that the information goes beyond the professionals directly to the communities, so that they understand what is happening elsewhere and so that demands can be made from the bottom up. We expect to receive interim returns of evaluation findings in September, although it will take longer to collect more scientific evidence.

I was asked about pensions. For pension purposes, CSOs are treated in the same way as all police staff. Each force has different terms and conditions, which also extend to pensions. There is no bar to CSOs becoming police officers through the standard application process. Some forces—including, I understand, the Metropolitan police—are considering fast-tracking CSOs into the police service, as they will already have met some early requirements.

The nature of the training given to community support officers is a decision for their chief officer. It will depend on the role that they perform and the powers that they are designated to exercise. The evaluation is important because CSOs are employed differently in different communities. Once we have that information we will consider what training should be provided for them to carry out their functions. Centrex has provided forces with guidance, and many other forces have adapted the training package devised specially for CSOs by the Metropolitan police.

Generally, the emphasis in CSO training is on problem solving and dealing with low-level disorder and antisocial behaviour. They are encouraged to use their powers only if other approaches are ineffective. They are not trained to deal with more serious criminal offences and are advised to call for police assistance if there is any doubt about their safety or that of the public.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe mentioned friction between CSOs and regular police officers. Local police forces are engaging more and more with the new resource and getting to grips with how it works on the ground. It is important to make an effort to include front-line police officers in development so that they can also contribute to the debate. However, so far there is no evidence of friction. CSOs are trained and supervised by police officers, and they even patrol with them; they work closely together. That is an important part of the teamwork ethos.

Points were raised about ID cards. We will come to those considerations in due course and, depending on the outcome of that debate, we will consider whether CSOs or the police should have the powers that my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe suggested. On the subject of public trust and reassurance, his suggestions for a log are interesting. CSOs can currently ask for the name and address of anyone that they suspect has committed an offence causing injury, harassment or alarm to any person, or loss or damage to property. As my hon. Friend will be aware, CSOs who have the detention powers that are being piloted can detain anyone whom they think has not provided the right details.

On the issue of the detention power, the time of 30 minutes was raised. As I said, the scheme is being piloted in certain areas and we are looking at the outcomes of those pilots as to whether they should be extended. A balance had to be struck between the role of the CSO, given their training and skills, and the need occasionally to detain someone for longer than 30 minutes. Parliament has decided that, in the vast majority of cases, 30 minutes would be long enough and that the role of the CSO would not be too enforcement-orientated at the expense of their other duties. We are entering a new area and will monitor that balance to see what works best. We do not yet have any formal analysis of the results of how those powers are exercised. The initial returns indicate that 30 minutes is proving to be enough in most cases, but that is an issue to which we must return.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire referred to the sums of money. The starting pay of constables does not include significant allowances and progression is obviously much more rapid. It is important to note the difference between cost and salary because of equipment and the additional costs of officers. CSOs are less expensive. We have not conducted a detailed analysis—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order.

Leyla Zana

3.30 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I was pleased to secure today's debate because it is two years since I saw Leyla Zana in prison in Ankara. She was waiting for the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, which was reviewing the sentence given to her nine years previously. I had arranged to see her beforehand, but there was a difficulty when I got to the prison because the staff did not expect me. There was a challenge at the main gate and it took some time to get into the prison. I sat in the prison governor's office for one and a half hours while he attempted to contact a Minister in the Turkish Government to obtain approval for my visit. The prison governor thought that Leyla Zana should not be in prison and that she should have been released.

I took Leyla Zana a birthday card because it was her birthday. The card was in Welsh and was X-rayed before being handed over because the authorities did not understand the language and were afraid that it contained a subversive message. The only message it contained was to emphasise the point that it is possible for people in one country to live peacefully together despite differences in background and language.

The meeting with Leyla lasted about two and a half hours, and I was grateful to the prison authorities for allowing me that length of time. I had heard much about her and seen pictures of her. When she met me, prison officers escorted her. She is a young, attractive woman of great dignity. We sat down together and she said how grateful she was for the many letters that she had received from people in Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom. She said that although she did not speak English, the letters meant a great deal to her because they showed that people were thinking of her.

Bianca Jagger was to have accompanied me, but the Turkish authorities said that she could not come because they have strict regulations on who can gain access to someone in prison. Visitors must have a particular or family reason to see a prisoner. My reason was that I chair the all-party group on human rights. I am also a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Commission on Human Rights, where a committee with six members selected from all countries campaigns for the human rights of members of parliament, some of whom are unfortunately in prison, in detention or cannot carry out their mandates.

The prison was old and derelict, like most prisons in Turkey. Leyla told me that she was allowed access to television and could read books and newspapers. In the past few years, she had even been allowed her own small garden in the prison. She said that she had not received any visits from her husband for many years because it was too dangerous for him to come to the prison. When her son last visited her in the early 1990s, he was detained overnight, so she told him not to come again. I believe that both of her children now live outside Turkey. She said that she was expecting a decision from the European Court, which was taking a long time.

It was a great privilege to talk to Leyla because she is a woman of great determination and sincerity, and she has strong convictions. In the past, she was offered amnesty on the ground that she was sick, but she refused it because she believes that the other three Kurdish MPs who were detained at the same trial should also be freed. It takes a truly remarkable person to make that sort of decision. She is young, wants to express her strong political views and has a young family that she wants to see grow up; yet she is still in prison.

After taking part of their parliamentary oath at the swearing in ceremony in Turkish and in Kurdish, Leyla and three other Turkish/Kurdish MPs were sentenced in 1994 to 15 years in jail. In May 1984, I swore my oath in the House of Commons in English and Welsh. There was no problem here, but there still is in Turkey.

At Leyla Zana's trial, she was accused of taking her oath in Kurdish and of wearing a hairband in the Kurdish colours: green, red and yellow. At her trial, she said that she had taken her oath in Turkish and Kurdish, and that she had said in Kurdish that she was swearing the oath for the sake of fraternity between the Kurdish and the Turkish peoples. Furthermore, she said that she had worn the Kurdish colours in protest against a legal provision that prohibited their use in the south-eastern part of Turkey in the late 1980s.

Leyla Zana was also accused of attending the funeral of a member of the Kurdistan Workers Party—the PKK. She explained that she was present at that funeral because the person in question was her cousin. Naturally, she could not deny her blood relationship with him and thus condemn her own family. She had also attended the funerals of members of the Turkish military forces.

Zana was the first Kurdish woman to be elected to Turkey's Parliament. She is a former candidate for the Nobel peace prize, and a winner of the Sakharov prize for freedom of thought, which is awarded by the European Parliament.

In July 2001, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the initial trial was unfair and called for her release or retrial. This January, the Turkish Government eventually passed legislation that required the retrial of any court cases that had successfully appealed to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The four MPs obtained a retrial under that legislation.

Leyla Zana, Hatip Dicle, Orhan Dogan and Selim Sadak were put on trial in December 1994 for membership of an armed gang and were sentenced to 15 years in prison. In July 2001, the European Court concluded that they had not received a fair trial and that article 6 of the European convention on human rights was violated owing to the presence of a military judge, the fact that the defendants were unable to defend themselves against a new charge that was introduced at the last hearing of the original trial, and the fact that the defendants and their lawyers were not allowed to question prosecution witnesses. Even so, it took until January this year for the Turkish Government to act. That was when the criminal procedures law was amended to allow for retrials in such cases. Yusuf Alatas, the defence lawyer for Leyla Zana and the other defendants, immediately applied to Ankara state security court No. 1 for a retrial, which was granted. However, his request that the defendants immediately be released until the trial was denied.

As a European Union candidate, Turkey must meet the criteria for membership that were agreed at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993—the

Copenhagen criteria—which deal with stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. Turkey started working towards fulfilling the criteria in March 2001. The Copenhagen European Council of December 2002 stated that if Turkey met the Copenhagen criteria by the 2004 Council of Europe, it would recommend that accession negotiations commence. Therefore, current events in Turkey are particularly sensitive.

The first retrial was adjourned on 21 February 2003, the second on 28 March, the third on 25April 2003 and the fifth on 20 June 2003. The date of the next hearing is 18 July—this Friday. The defence lawyer's report concluded that:

"The re-trial of Leyla Zana, Orhan Dogan, Hatip Dicle and Selim Sadak is being conducted in a manner which violates both the principle of fair trial and the points determined in the decision of the European Human Rights Court, dated July 17, 2001. Until now, the practices of the Court have been far from being objective."

In addition, Mr. Alatas stated that

"the practice and decisions of the court at the hearing on May 23, 2003, clearly indicated that the court was not objective, that the trial was being conducted totally along the lines of the wishes of the prosecution, that none of the requests of the defence would be accepted, that a real trial was not being conducted, and the court would persist with its verdict taken in 1994."

A report by Paul Richmond, a British barrister, on behalf of the International Commission of Jurists Centre for the Independence of Judges and Lawyers was published in June. It presents even more damning evidence of the Kafkaesque nature of the retrial. It says that certain aspects of the right to a fair trial were respected, but that there are

"profound concerns that the principle of equality of arms between the defence and the prosecution was not observed and that the tribunal was neither independent nor impartial".

Let me give some examples of that. The prosecution was allowed to present 26 witnesses, but the defence was not allowed to call even one witness. The defence was prevented from directly asking relevant questions of witnesses for the prosecution. The prosecution failed to disclose material evidence against the accused, a witness for the prosecution whose first language was Kurdish rather than Turkish was not provided with an interpreter in the courtroom and the defence was denied the possibility of having its questions of witnesses and submissions to the court entered directly into the court record. I could go on. If that is Turkish justice, I would not be very happy about being tried by a court in Turkey.

Such clearly unjust procedures are reminiscent not only of Kafka but of a play by Harold Pinter called "Mountain Language", which hon. Members may have seen at the National Theatre, in which the mother of a Kurdish prisoner in a Turkish prison was allowed to speak with her son only in Turkish—a language that she cannot speak.

Although Turkey's recent constitutional reforms have improved the situation on paper regarding the Kurdish language, I am afraid that the reality is very different. It is important to look not at the aspirations but at the reality. In its 2003 world report published this month, Human Rights Watch notes that the Turkish Parliament's August 2002 legislation lifted restrictions on minority language courses and broadcasting, including Kurdish, but the reforms were hedged with qualifications that could block effective implementation.

Most of us have been to Turkey on various occasions. I was at the Ilisu dam some years ago. I was driven there by a driver who had sold his only cow to buy a dish so that he could watch Kurdish language television. There are examples of such continuing attitudes to the Kurdish language.

Leyla Zana's lawyer has confirmed to us today that at the defence's formal request for a retrial the presiding judge refused and commented in open court that

"the deficiencies and mistakes identified by the European Court of Human Rights will not change the guilt of the accused".

The same judge presided at the initial trial in 1994 and remains the presiding judge in the current retrial. Obviously, comments such as that must cast doubts on the judge's and the court's impartiality.

The International Commission of Jurists also has misgivings about the independence of the Turkish judiciary. Although normally independent, it often responds to directives about threats to the state issued by the Government and the national security council. The report of the European Parliament ad hoc delegation to the retrial in April this year stated that

"there was little evidence that things had changed substantially since 1994."

In particular, those who compiled the report were unhappy that the defence lawyers were

"unable to put direct questions to the witnesses".

That practice had also been prohibited at the original trial. Members noted that the trial gave Turkey an opportunity to show the world that it was determined to implement its reforms, but so far there is no evidence that this was the case.

I would like to end with a quotation from Leyla Zana, from her original trial in 1994. She said:

"My worst crime, in the view of the prosecution, seems to be a phrase I spoke in Kurdish on the brotherhood of Kurds and Turks and their coexistence in equality and democracy when I took the loyalty oath in Parliament. Even the colour of my clothes seems to have been a 'separatist crime'. Furthermore, simply by mentioning the existence of the Kurdish people and Kurdistan, by peaceably demanding recognition of Kurdish culture and identity in a democratic system and within existing borders, I have supposedly defended the aims of the Kurdistan Workers Party . . . But that party is engaged in an armed struggle, while all my activity is aimed at silencing the weapons and seeking a peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem."

That is what she said in her defence at her original trial in 1994. It is an absolute disgrace that four of our fellow parliamentarians languish in a prison in Turkey for doing little more than using their own language and displaying the colours of the minority of which they are members. I hope that while Turkey continues to keep

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these people in prison its route to accession will be obstructed by those who believe in human rights and democracy.

3.49 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) for her speech and I congratulate her on obtaining the debate and on her continued interest in the case of Leyla Zana. In a statement in the House this morning, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary paid tribute to my hon. Friend's commitment to human rights and her work on Iraq. I wonder how many other Parliaments around the world have such a redoubtable champion of human rights. There is a saying that hard cases make bad law but, when it comes to human rights, it is only the individual who is the centre of our attention. The fact that my hon. Friend went and talked to Leyla Zana in prison means that she brings so much more to the debate than simply a factual report of the conditions of that sad case.

As my hon. Friend informed us, Leyla Zana and three other former Democratic party deputies, Hatip Dicle, Orhan Dogan and Selim Sadak remain in prison in Turkey and are being retried by the Ankara state security court. That retrial is extremely important for the individuals concerned, and as a symbol of how Turkey is changing. The legislative reforms passed in August 2002 and February 2003 that made the retrial possible were a significant advance in the protection of human rights in Turkey.

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): I hear what my hon. Friend the Minister has said about the changes that have taken place, but I believe the observations of my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) far more. I spoke at a rally of Kurdish people that took place at 3 o'clock last Sunday, and most of them said that change has taken place only on paper, not in reality. That is the point that my hon. Friend makes. Will my hon. Friend the Minister give a decisive answer to the last question that she asked? Will he say whether Turkish accession negotiations should be allowed to begin before these sorts of human rights violations are brought to a full stop?

Mr. MacShane: I shall answer the points of my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley. Her Majesty's Government, the European Commission and the European Parliament have always taken a keen interest in this case. In 1995, Leyla Zana received the European Parliament's Sakharov prize—an annual human rights award. I am glad that my hon. Friend continues to ensure that the case maintains a high profile. Leyla Zana is also a journalist, and her writings have been translated into English and published in the United States. PEN's writers in prison committee have adopted her, and I pay tribute to the important work carried out by PEN on behalf of writers in prison. There are still too many books that remain banned in Turkey.

Article 11 of title II of the draft constitution—I stress that it is a draft constitution and that nothing has been finalised—for the European Union on freedom of expression and information states:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers."

It continues:

"The freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected."

I welcome, as I think the House will, the standards laid down in the draft constitution.

It would not be appropriate for me as a Minister to comment on the conduct of an ongoing trial. However, I can fully support my hon. Friend's previous assertion, that

"as Members of Parliament, we should be concerned about Members of Parliament in other countries who cannot fulfil their mandates, perhaps because they have been sent to prison unfairly."—[*Official Report*, 2 May 2002; Vol. 384, c.1098.]

The Government have always maintained that the prosecution of democratically elected politicians for the non-violent expression of their views is wrong. My hon. Friend has spoken for all Members and Ministers. I will make sure that a copy of *Hansard* containing her speech is sent to the Turkish embassy. I will also ensure that Leyla's lawyer and family know of the concern that the British Parliament has for her case.

Successive Governments have monitored this case closely since 1994. Following the lifting of their parliamentary immunity, Leyla Zana, Hatip Dicle, Orhan Dogan and Selim Sadak were tried with four other Democratic party deputies for treason under article 125 of the Turkish penal code. They were found not guilty of treason, but were convicted of lesser charges under article 168.2 of the penal code, which refers to membership of an armed society or band committed, inter alia, to destroying the territorial integrity of the state. They were sentenced to 15 years in prison. They appealed to the Turkish appeal court and finally to the European Court of Human Rights on the grounds of breaches of their right to liberty, to a fair trial, to freedom of expression and to freedom from discrimination on political and ethnic grounds in the enjoyment of those rights.

On 17 July 2001, the European Court of Human Rights unanimously found Turkey in violation of articles 6.3d and 6.1 of the European convention on human rights, and ruled that the deputies had been tried by a court that lacked independence and impartiality and that they had not enjoyed a fair trial.

Britain has played its part in the Council of Europe's Council of Ministers to help to ensure that the necessary measures are taken to implement this ruling. On 30 April 2002, for example, the Council urged the Turkish Government to comply with the Court's decision without further delay. We expect all member states of the Council of Europe to comply fully with the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

We also raised the case of Leyla Zana and her co-defendants with the Turkish authorities at various levels, and regularly raise it with Turkish officials in Ankara, and at more formal events and proceedings, such as in the continuing human rights dialogue between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its counterparts in Turkey. From those contacts, I can report that the current Turkish Government, who came to power long after the events in question began, are as convinced as we are that the retrial should be a fair and

just process. We are both following the progress of the trial attentively, and will no doubt both have things to say about the outcome once the judicial process has run its course.

I can also report that we are monitoring the trial closely through the British embassy in Ankara and are co-ordinating with EU partners to ensure that all hearings are attended. For instance, a representative of the British embassy attended a hearing on 25 April, and we received a report of the most recent hearing on 20 June from representatives from the embassies of the previous and current EU presidencies of Greece and Italy respectively. British embassy representatives have also met Yusuf Alatas, Leyla Zana's lawyer.

The retrial is symbolic of a sea change in the protection of human rights in Turkey. Turkey has undergone significant reform since the far-reaching constitutional changes of October 2001. In part, that reform has been driven by Turkey's EU candidacy—a candidacy that the Government fully support. Human rights are a central element of the Copenhagen political criteria, which Turkey, like all EU candidates, must meet before it can begin accession negotiations. The criteria require that Turkey must achieve

"stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities".

They therefore require Turkey to address many of the problems highlighted by the case of Leyla Zana and her co-defendants. In this way, Turkey's EU candidacy reinforces the Justice and Development Party—AKP—Government's own reform agenda, but they have made it clear that they see the reforms not as a means to EU accession but as an end in themselves for the benefit of the Turkish people.

In the past six months, Turkey has made considerable progress towards meeting these criteria. It has passed four legislative packages of reform, each of which contains clear evidence that Turkey's political leaders are determined to align the country with EU standards and have brought about far-reaching change. Implementation remains the most difficult challenge, as the AKP Government have acknowledged, but there has been significant progress. Examples include: abolishing the death penalty; introducing better training for the judiciary; improving pre-trial detention and prison facilities; lifting the state of emergency where it remained; ratifying the UN international covenants on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; and, of course, allowing for and carrying out retrials in line with judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. Paradoxically, the case of Leyla Zana and her fellow deputies highlights the progress that Turkey has made since the mid-1990s, in particular in respect of freedom of expression, the rights of minorities, and the professionalism of the Turkish judiciary.

Implementation of the reforms is crucial, as Turkey's EU candidacy will ultimately be judged on that. Problems still exist and should not be forgotten, but the attitude towards human rights in Turkey is fundamentally different from how it was in 1994.

Fareham (School Funding)

4 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this matter before the House rises for the summer recess—and, indeed, before the local schools' summer term ends.

The experience of head teachers in Fareham is that the increase in school funds this year has not met the higher salary costs that were incurred because of the Government's actions. As a consequence, teacher vacancies have remained unfilled, learning and support assistants' places are being cut, and school reserves are being used to maintain the status quo. Also, the prospect for the next financial year looks bleak.

All the schools that I have spoken to acknowledge that there has been a significant increase in school funding in recent years. In Hampshire, the Government spending per pupil has increased by £1,040 in the past six years. As a consequence of that funding increase, schools have been able to expand their teaching staff and recruit more learning and support assistants.

It would be appropriate to register schools' concerns about how that funding increase has been brought about. A good proportion of the increase comes from funds that schools have had to bid for to tackle particular issues. Schools have told me that they have concerns about that. Once the initiatives have been entrenched in the school and the funding streams have ended, they are left to meet the cost of those initiatives from their own budget. Schools have also found that the funding streams are unpredictable. Often, the bidding for additional funds takes place during the course of the school year, and schools have found it difficult to respond to that. However, I recognise that the Government have heard those messages from head teachers, and have listened to them. That is to their credit.

There should be increased certainty of funding for schools to enable them to budget to meet their priorities. Given that the Government have a three-year comprehensive spending review, they should be able to give schools an indication of their funding for that period. Yesterday, at the hearing of the Select Committee on Education and Skills, the Secretary of State suggested that that would happen. Fareham schools would welcome that.

Schools in my constituency face a funding crisis. In answer to a question asked by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), the Secretary of State for Education and Skills said that

"the funding of schools is a shared responsibility between national Government and local government . . . Local education authorities take decisions of various kinds—how much to distribute to individual schools, how much is operated centrally, and so on. I believe that both the national Government and local authorities should take responsibility for the effects of those decisions on the funding of individual schools."—[*Official Report*, 26 June 2003; Vol. 407, c. 1187.]

Hampshire county council received one of the lowest financial settlements of any shire county this year; it was significantly—just under 4 per cent.—below the national average. That, of course, is a consequence of the redistribution of resources away from shire counties such as Hampshire. Despite that settlement, Hampshire

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county council decided that it could not allow schools to suffer because of the redistribution of funding. In response to the findings of the Government's questionnaire, which tried—unsuccessfully, in my view—to pin the blame on LEAs, the county education officer wrote:

"The County Council, however, gives a very high priority to the education of its pupils and decided to exceed the passporting target even though this was met from local resources and contributed to a council tax increase of 15%. This increase flowed through to schools. Schools, therefore, received more than the Government specified."

Hampshire county council certainly recognises its share of responsibility together with the Government. Not only did it passport 105.1 per cent. of the target to schools, but it was one of only four councils in the south-east that increased the amount devolved to schools by a greater amount than the increase in the schools budget. That was a clear policy initiative by Hampshire county council.

It is fair to say, and I hope that the Minister will recognise it in his remarks, that Hampshire county council and council tax payers in Hampshire have fulfilled their responsibilities towards local schools. That is the background against which I shall set out my remarks.

I shall explain what head teachers in Fareham consider to be the cause of the funding shortfall and discuss their response to it. They have attributed their financial problems to significant rises in salaries and related costs. Those costs account for a significant proportion of their budget. One local secondary school said that salary and related costs accounted for 85 per cent. of its budget. Ten to 12 head teachers in my constituency cited four reasons for the increase in those costs.

First, head teachers cite the hike in national insurance contributions: in one secondary school, that accounted for about £27,000. Secondly, they cited the increase in contributions to teachers' pension funds: in the same school the increase was £105,000—a significant amount in a school of any size. Thirdly, heads have cited the funding of performance-related pay as a factor in the shortfall. They recognise that that factor will recur as teachers progress through the criteria for each threshold, improving their performance and becoming entitled to further performance payments, which must be funded. This year, head teachers felt that there was a shortfall in the Government's calculations of how much money should go to schools in Hampshire. Fourthly, the collapse of the nine salary grades into six has led to grade creep, in the sense that, in the new structure, if a salary point is not included in the grade below, teachers have had to move up to the next grade, with the consequent increase in salaries.

Together, such increases are significant: a primary school in my constituency said that the increased salary costs this year were £36,000. In another, much larger school, the increase is £98,000. From time to time, Ministers have blamed the decline in pupil numbers for the deficits of individual schools, but those deficits are despite flat pupil numbers in the first case and a rise in pupil numbers in the second.

What have the consequences been for local schools in tackling these deficits? I have received feedback from nearly half the schools in my constituency, and I base my comments on how individual heads and boards of governors have decided to balance the books.

In several schools the governors have used reserves to meet the shortfall, but that option is not cost free. Often, those reserves have been intended to contribute towards a building plan, and such plans have had to be deferred or cancelled to meet the funding shortfall. That is clearly a one-off exercise, as the piggy bank can be emptied once only. A continued squeeze on funding next year will have serious consequences in those schools. They will experience a double whammy: they will not only have to claw back the funding deficit from this year, which they met through reserves, but will have to cope with any funding decreases.

What other impacts have there been on schools that did not have reserves? Vacancies that have arisen because a member of staff has left have not been filled, or have been filled on a part-time basis, with other teachers increasing their teaching time to meet the shortfall. In a couple of schools, non-teaching positions have been converted into teaching positions, and the administrative work load has been shared among other staff members. Several teaching staff on temporary contracts have had their contracts terminated early or not renewed; again, their teaching time has been passed on to other staff members, increasing their former colleagues' work load.

Hampshire county council advises me that at least one primary school in my constituency is making 1.4 teaching staff redundant. Schools are trying to save money on supply teachers, and either the head or the deputy head fills in for lessons. That means that they spend less time giving the school the leadership that it needs and the staff the support that they need. Schools are cutting back on buying textbooks. One school has cut expenditure on textbooks by 65 per cent., and expenditure on staff professional development by 80 per cent., to avoid making teachers redundant.

We have seen the end of contracts for some learning support assistants, while others have had to reapply for fewer jobs. In one case, a school dropped from six to four LSAs.

The question from head teachers is: how can they implement the work load initiative if they are cutting back on the people to whom teachers should be transferring their work load? That is a problem that many will have to wrestle with this year and next. At another school, the senior teacher leading the learning support unit for children with particular education needs was redeployed to fill a vacancy elsewhere in the school, leaving the unit without a full-time leader. Schools are cutting back in other areas too, whether that is the maintenance of grounds and buildings or information and communications technology costs.

I have been impressed by the resourcefulness of heads and governors in trying to close the gap in their budget. Their primary focus is to avoid compromising the education of their pupils, and they are committed to maintaining the diversity and richness of the curriculum and carrying out some of the initiatives specified by the Government. I want to take the opportunity to thank them, teachers and parents for all their hard work to

mitigate the impact of the funding shortfall. They have done a sterling job, as have the county council and council tax payers, in trying to fill the gap left by the shortfall in Government funding.

Where do we go next? One chair of governors has written:

"The cuts we have made cannot be repeated in another year and will damage the life of the school . . . Smaller teaching groups, better support for less able pupils, inclusion measures to help disaffected pupils, stimulation for more able pupils . . . more administrative staff to reduce teacher workloads must all become unaffordable."

Schools in Fareham are concerned that this will be the first of several difficult years for school funding. That concern is shared by Hampshire county council, whose county treasurer wrote to me recently to say that if the general grant floor and schools formula spending share per pupil are both set at 2.5 per cent., there would be an estimated funding shortfall of £11 million next year, which is equivalent to 2 per cent. of this year's budget.

In the same letter, the treasurer pointed out that school spending nationally is set to rise by 5.2 per cent., so clearly some LEAs will do well if Hampshire is going to get only a 2.5 per cent. increase. In answer to an oral question by me last month, the Minister said:

"We are committed to ensuring that every school receives a reasonable per pupil increase for next year and the year after that."—[*Official Report*, 26 June 2003; Vol. 407, c. 1195.]

My concern is about what the Minister views as reasonable, and whether he will agree with the view of heads, teachers and governors in Fareham schools. Will schools locally see a 5.2 per cent. increase in school funding, or will it be more like the 2.5 per cent. increase suggested by the county treasurer? Will they get a raw deal again next year?

Based on the Government's track record, Hampshire schools can expect to receive a below-average increase. Last year, the average national increase in spending per pupil was 6 per cent, while in Hampshire it was 5.2 per cent., and in the previous year national spending again increased by 6 per cent. per pupil, but in Hampshire the Government's contribution increased by only 5.5 per cent. Will the Government rectify that trend?

Where will the funding shortfall leave Fareham schools? The schools that have emptied their piggy bank this year will need to consider some of the same budget cuts that other schools have made, particularly in the largest element of costs—staff. The schools that have already made cuts may need to consider fresh cuts next year unless their funding position stabilises. Short-term measures such as saving on maintenance cannot continue indefinitely, and at some point they will need to be reversed. To reverse those cuts, cuts will be needed elsewhere. That is not scaremongering; those concerns have been expressed to me by head teachers and chairs of governors in my constituency.

The solution is in the Government's hands. As Hampshire has proved this year, authorities can increase the burden on council tax payers to protect school budgets, and the Government will need to consider by how much they are prepared to increase their contribution to Hampshire schools to protect the quality and diversity of their education. The closer the increase is to the national average increase of 5.2 per cent., the lower the risk that teacher and learning support assistant numbers will need to be cut. The smaller the increase, the greater the likelihood that schools will once again have to consider more reductions in staff costs, putting at risk the quality and diversity of education in local schools. It is time for the Government to recognise that Fareham's schools need a fair deal on funding.

As the Secretary of State for Education and Skills said in the House in June, councils and the Government have to take

"responsibility for the effects of those decisions on the funding of individual schools."—[*Official Report*, 26 June 2003; Vol. 407, c. 1187.]

Given the county council's track record on school funding, without a fair deal for Fareham schools next year the spotlight will be on the Government, who will be held responsible by parents, teachers and governors for their decision on the funding of schools.

4.14 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): It is conventional on these occasions to congratulate the hon. Member concerned on securing the debate. Today I do so sincerely, because the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) has made a thoughtful and serious speech. We have shared several debates in this Chamber, and I hope that I shall not do irreparable damage to the hon. Gentleman's political career when I say that his speech was the best use of an Adjournment debate in which I have been a participant. I may worry him even more when I say that I agree with much of what he said.

The hon. Gentleman explained matters with a fair degree of generosity to the present Government, and also assessed some of the difficulties in the system in a reasonably fair-minded way. As I have said, I do not want to end his political career, so it is just as well that not too many people are present to listen. I hope that the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), who has just arrived in the Chamber, will keep the secret. I hope also to give a serious response to the points that the hon. Member for Fareham made.

In the time available to him, the hon. Gentleman could not mention the progress that has been made in Hampshire schools, in both primary and secondary sectors. I am sure that he has seen that progress when he has visited schools. I was interested to dig up the statistics; there are statistics on everything, but these show that the percentage of children in Hampshire who are doing well at English at age 11 is above the national average. For maths the figure is at the national average, and for science it is above it.

For GCSEs, the performance of secondary schools is not, interestingly enough, as far above the national average as one might think. There are no doubt relevant educational issues that we could discuss at another time, but none the less there is clear evidence of teachers, heads, governors and the wider community working in a committed way to fulfil the potential of all pupils in Hampshire. The hon. Gentleman's remarks made it clear that he has great admiration for the work that those people do, and that is shared by the Government.

The hon. Gentleman was generous enough to refer to the increase of about 36 per. cent. in funding to Hampshire through the local formula over the past five

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years. He made reference also to the increase in the school standards direct grant, which has been significant. He was not able to touch on the capital position, about which I asked my officials to find out. It is striking that Hampshire's capital budget for this year is £71 million, whereas it was £15 million to £20 million in 1998–99. I hope that that makes a long-term contribution to the education of pupils in his constituency.

The hon. Gentleman devoted a significant part of his remarks to analysis of the problem, and to his solution to the way in which the funding formula distributes money to Hampshire as a whole, and then raised points about how money is distributed from Hampshire local education authorities to schools. I shall deal with those matters. This has been a year of significant change in the schools funding system—notably with respect to the way in which central Government distribute grants to LEAs, and the way in which the LEAs distribute grants to schools. I shall deal with that topic.

I think that the hon. Gentleman would agree that the old system for the distribution of funds from the Government to the LEAs was fatally flawed. It was out of date; it was based on the 1991 census. It was even more complicated than the current system, and impossible to explain. It did not reflect the division of responsibilities between LEAs and schools. The hon. Gentleman will know that under the current system there is real clarity about the LEA block of funding and the proportion that is available to schools. I think that he would accept that that is a step forward.

Our aim with the new system has been to ensure that central Government will attach a similar amount of money to similar pupils in different parts of the country. That is why every LEA receives three blocks of funding for each pupil. First there is an entitlement for every pupil: just over £2,000 for a primary pupil and just over £2,650 for a secondary school pupil. Secondly, there is a top-up for deprivation and additional educational needs. Thirdly, there is recognition of higher costs for salaries, recruitment and retention.

The new system is based on the evidence that we have about extra costs arising from deprivation, and other extra costs. The hon. Gentleman will know that, in relation to additional educational needs, we have used a wider definition of poverty than has been conventional in the past. Instead of simply using the income support indicator to recognise poverty, we have ensured in the new system that the funding formula recognises families in low-wage work, and that should rebound to the benefit of Hampshire where employment is high but where there are significant pockets of low wage-work.

The hon. Gentleman will also recognise that the additional costs of education in London and the south-east notably impose particular pressures on schools. The new system recognises 99 authorities that face those additional costs, and we have tried to recognise that in the system.

The hon. Gentleman did not discuss sparsity, so I shall not dwell on that, but move to this year's funding difficulties. He started by talking about problems in areas where pupil numbers are falling, as is notably the case in the primary sector. Nationwide, there is a fall of about 50,000 in the number of pupils in the primary sector. My back-of-the-envelope calculation suggests that that is not a problem in Hampshire. It has an increasing population, which explains why its overcall cash increase of 5.9 per cent. translates into a 3.2 per cent. increase per pupil. That shows a significant increase in the number of pupils, which brings its own problems, and I have just completed a statutory instrument with the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) about the way in which the system copes with rising numbers.

My constituency has the opposite problem, which also imposes its own burdens. The hon. Gentleman probably knows more about South Shields than many other hon. Members because of his former candidacy. He is not the only Opposition Member who has fought South Shields. The hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) cast a blazing trail in South Shields during the 1987 general election, so there are at least three of us who can testify to its joys.

I shall dwell on the situation this year, because it has been a uniquely difficult year for school funding. It has been unique for the amount of extra money that central Government have put in, but also for some of the costs that schools have faced. The hon. Member for Fareham referred to the increased cost of the teachers' pension scheme. It is important to put on the record that that cost has been taken care of separately from the per-pupil increases to which he referred. He will know from answers that I have given that those increases are conducted on a like-for-like basis. The cost of pension increases is factored into the system on top of that at, from memory, about £587 million nationally, and that has been fed into the system. He also referred to increased national insurance contributions, and it is true that schools have had to pay those increases for their workers.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the upper pay scale, which has risen in a number of contexts as a significant cost for schools. The upper pay scale is not just a cost that arises as a matter of course; it arises as a matter of choice. He will know that the pay system for teachers has two key elements in addition to the basic uplift. Recognition of competence—the so-called threshold agreement—pays an extra £2,000 to teachers outside London and an extra £4,000 to teachers inside London.

There is also an excellence element above the threshold—the so-called upper pay scale. There is a national scale, but the cost to each school reflects the decisions made by heads and governors on how many teachers to promote from one point to the next, and he will know that, nationally, about 90 per cent. of teachers progress from upper pay scale point 1 to 2, notwithstanding that the Government have argued strongly that the upper pay scale should recognise excellence rather than competence. That is why, when we submitted our evidence last week to the School Teachers Review Body for this year, we made new proposals to support the decisions of governors and heads in exercising their discretion over the upper pay scale points.

Many head teachers' associations have argued strongly that heads should be supported by stronger guidance from the centre, and we have made a commitment to provide that. We have also provided for every governing body to decide in April each year how

many teachers the head should promote up the upper pay scale. As John Dunford of the Secondary Heads Association said last week, the current progression up the scale is unaffordable, and it is important that we play our part in supporting the decisions of heads and governors.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the cost of supply teachers. Of course that is a cost that we want to try to squeeze—not by having heads taking on those responsibilities, but by trying to minimise the amount of time that teachers have to spend out of the classroom, either on courses or through sickness. The extent to which we can squeeze that cost—which is a significant bill of, I think, about £950 million nationwide for the annual costs of teacher supply—releases money for other purposes.

Looking forward, we obviously need to reflect on and learn from the experience of this year. Perhaps I could address the hon. Gentleman's final two or three points by setting out how my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State plans to go forward. The hon. Gentleman will know that on 15 May my right hon. Friend set clear criteria for moving forward in 2004–05 and 2005–06.

The hon. Gentleman rightly referred to the importance of a multi-year planning framework. It is certainly our intention and aspiration to move to three-year funding of schools, but he will know that we do not fund schools directly—we require local authorities to engage in that process. There is obviously a particular difficulty in the schooling area because of changing pupil numbers in any one school, which pose a particular burden on any planning framework. None the less, we want to move to a three-year planning framework, as he does. The decisions of the School Teachers Review Body are absolutely critical to that. We argued to the STRB last year that a three-year framework for school funding was essential. Unfortunately, no one else supported us, not even the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends, and we were unable to make any headway with the STRB last year. This year, I am pleased to report that the Local Government Association and the two head teachers' associations have argued for a two-year deal to the end of the comprehensive spending review period, and I hope that that will make a difference.

We also need to get the balance right between money that goes direct to schools from the centre and money that is fed through the local government framework. The hon. Gentleman referred to the difficulties faced by some of his schools through the reduction in standards funds. In this context, we face a clear dilemma. He and I would like to see more money distributed as necessary direct to schools through the LEA framework in a simple way that does not require any bidding and has no ring-fencing. That is what we have tried to do this year, but as he will know from his own schools, although many schools and LEAs argued for it, they do not like the way in which it has worked. We are carefully examining the stated plans for further devolution of funding and the reduction of standards funds grants, because there have been difficulties and turbulence in the system. I can assure him that we are looking hard at those plans.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the importance of earlier budget notification to schools. He may have more of a business background than I, but even someone who has not run a business will know that if one knows one's budget only in February or March, it makes things difficult for the start of the financial year in April. That system is clearly badly in need of reform, so that we get much earlier notification to schools of their budgets as well as having longer-term budget setting. We are strongly determined to do that, so that schools know earlier what money they have to play with.

It is also important—this is not a matter that the hon. Gentleman was able to dwell on—that the balance between out-of-school funding for special needs or other collective services and in-school money should be right. Although Hampshire has a laudable record in that area, as it has in others, other LEAs have struggled to contain out-of-school costs.

I hope that I have responded in kind to the seriousness of the hon. Gentleman's speech. I felt in his speech a determination to seek greater funding for education because it is the most important priority for the nation. He will find no stronger supporter in that matter than me. The quantum of education funding that has been given to our schools over the past generations—the point applies to Labour Governments in the 1970s as well as Conservative Governments after them—has been too low. We must correct that in Hampshire, as well as elsewhere. I look forward to the hon. Gentleman's support as we try to argue the case for greater investment in our education system over the years ahead.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Four o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 16 July 2003

[MR. FRANK COOK *in the Chair*]

Antisocial Behaviour

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Would it be in order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for us to remove our jackets?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It would not be in order to remove jackets in this Chamber.

Mr. Allen: At my surgery last Saturday, I was visited by a middle-aged man whom I shall call Mr. Smith. He told me about his elderly parents, both of whom suffer ill health. They have a family living next door to them. The father of that family is in prison, the mother is a drug dealer and the teenage children live by the motto, "No one tells us what to do." The elderly couple suffer music, sometimes until dawn. They have had their fence burned and demolished, they are attacked by their neighbours' dog, they have been personally abused and assaulted and they have six crime numbers arising from police visits next door. They have endured that for two years without relief, despite the efforts of local services to help them. I dedicate this debate to them and to the many others who need our Government to take action on their behalf.

We must start from a position of honesty and say that we are still a long way from defeating antisocial behaviour. It is not foremost a question of lawyers or even Ministers, although we need both. It is a question of normal law-abiding people—our constituents—who are being driven crazy by bad neighbours, kids with no values, verbal and mental intimidation and a daily degraded quality of life. We must do something about that. Technical and legal reasons for standing back and letting people suffer are no longer acceptable.

To their great credit, the Labour Government in 1998 showed their awareness of that serious problem and decided on urgent action. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 provided for local authorities or the police to apply to a magistrates court for an antisocial behaviour order if someone over 10 years of age had acted

"in a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household",

if deemed necessary to protect other individuals from further such behaviour in a local authority area. ASBOs may prohibit any form of activity for a specific period or indefinitely until discharged by the court. The Government and, no doubt, previous Governments have treated the issue seriously, but the problem is massive and our attempts to pin it down must be constant and permanent.

ASBOs are just one part of the armoury, not a panacea. That said, after six years in government, we should be doing better than the several hundred ASBOs that are imposed each year. ASBOs should be running into thousands per year and should be a permanent part of the armoury of local authorities and police against that small minority who make everyone else's life a misery.

ASBOs are a sophisticated and effective tool for tackling antisocial behaviour, but they have had teething problems and need further work. They are still dependent on witnesses, who are easily intimidated. In white, working class areas and tough outer-city estates of the sort that I am familiar with, as are the Minister and other hon. Members, witnesses are easily intimated, particularly when the antisocial behaviour is perpetrated by younger people, often against older and more established residents.

Bringing a case to court requires immense resources and time from local authority, police, probation and housing officers. They do incredible work, but must set aside a vast amount of time to make an ASBO stick. Often, bail is all too easily granted to ASBO offenders, not least because of the lack of secure places.

Many of the problems might have been avoided had there been proper pre-legislative scrutiny of the whole concept. We could have asked those whom we are now asking to operate ASBOs how ASBOs might work best. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will consider taking the quite imaginative step of having post-legislative scrutiny of ASBOs and of commissioning a parliamentary forum, including colleagues who are present this morning, to take evidence from practitioners on how to make ASBOs better.

The Minister may not agree with my main contention about the confusion surrounding the definition of civil and criminal burdens of proof, but many people may be confused, even if the Minister and the judges are clear about the matter. Perhaps one way to resolve the confusion and to make ASBOs work even better is to have a dialogue in a parliamentary forum or in another forum that the Minister considers appropriate.

I make my comments entirely from a constructive position. I hope that they do not come over as destructive in any sense. My comments follow a long line of efforts by Nottingham to improve ASBOs. I pay tribute to the police in the city and to local councillors and officers of Nottingham city council for their great efforts over many years to promote changes in ASBOs. Many of those changes have been accepted and implemented.

In that context, I also thank a number of Ministers: primarily, Lord Irvine, the former Lord Chancellor; my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, who used to occupy the position that the Minister now occupies; and our former, lamented colleague David Lock. All those people worked as a team with me and other colleagues from Nottingham to improve ASBOs.

The widespread teamwork that we have brought to bear on the matter was summed up for me when one of our local police inspectors, Jeff Whitmore, whom I will quote later, cornered my right hon. Friend the then Home Secretary, now the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. I will never forget the

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picture of Jeff talking and my right hon. Friend writing. The outcome, to my right hon. Friend's great credit, was a considerable tightening of the guidance on ASBOs. We have a good, strong, positive record when it comes to improving ASBOs. I hope that the Minister will take my remarks in that context.

Nottingham has not given up and today I want to focus on one key ASBO problem. The potential strength, but also one of the weaknesses, of ASBOs stems from their unusual legal status. They draw on both civil and criminal law. ASBOs are regarded as civil proceedings, but there are two problems. First, to obtain an ASBO can require more than a civil level of proof. Secondly, if the order is breached, proving the breach requires a criminal level of proof, which is "beyond all reasonable doubt". A civil level of proof refers to "the balance of probability".

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Does the hon. Gentleman not think that the criminal level of proof is right, given that a young person could face a five-year prison sentence, or another strong sentence?

Mr. Allen: If the hon. Lady will allow me, I will tackle some of those points later. I will make a couple of points that might help her to understand where I am coming from.

In October 2002, the House of Lords, in the McCann case, determined the standard of proof. Much as I hate to do this, for the record I will quote certain parts of that judgment. It was stated that

"given the seriousness of matters involved, at least some reference to the heightened civil standard would usually be necessary.

For essentially practical reasons, the judge in the McCann case decided to apply the criminal standard. The Court of Appeal said that would usually be the right course to adopt. Lord Bingham of Cornhill had observed that the heightened civil standard and the criminal standard were virtually indistinguishable. Pragmatism dictated that the task of magistrates should be made more straightforward by ruling that they must, in all cases under section 1 of the 1998 Act apply the criminal standard."

There are other quotes. There is, in my opinion, a degree of confusion among practitioners that it would be helpful to have resolved one way or another.

No local council will risk public money and days of officers' time gambling on further interpretation of such guidelines. If in doubt, it will have to let those suffering antisocial behaviour stew. When I say "stew", I do not mean for a day or two, or a couple of weeks. The case to which I referred earlier has been going on for months and years. I am not making a straightforward crossover and saying that, if we changed the law today, that case would be dealt with. It is not as simple as that, but people are in such positions for months, and possibly years, suffering and often unable to move.

One problem for the Law Lords is that they have cases but not constituents. That is one of the problems with their lordships in general, and perhaps with the Law Lords in particular. I suggest to the Minister that, as we establish a new supreme court, the senior judiciary must address that problem through training and outreach. As an interim measure, I intend to copy this speech to their lordships the Law Lords and invite them to meet Mr. and Mrs. Smith and many other families desperate for relief. I think that that sort of grounding would be no bad thing for their lordships when they make decisions on matters that appear to be legal technicalities, but make ordinary people's lives unbearable.

There are times when it is difficult to prove harassment, alarm and distress to that high standard to which I referred. The public may not come forward to give evidence, or harassment may have to be interpreted from the actions of a class of people, such as in the case of begging—a big problem in Nottingham—where the public complain about the actions of a class but not individuals. Beggars cause distress, but it is difficult to prove the standard required for an ASBO.

In a recent case in Preston, the police attempted to impose an ASBO on a prostitute, who had prostitution convictions. The magistrates court refused to grant that on the ground that it could not be proved beyond all reasonable doubt that she had caused harassment, alarm or distress. Meanwhile, the problems of used condoms and syringes being left lying around, sex acts in doorways and women being afraid to walk the streets in the area continue, as they do in my city.

All the immense local effort to bolster witnesses, undertake surveillance, produce reports and initiate the case is often wasted, with all the resulting demoralisation that that entails, and glee for the offenders. To prevent that, to enhance the reputation of ASBOs and to increase their usage, the standard of proof required to obtain an order must be clarified, either by the Minister's remarks and getting those across to all who wish to use ASBOs more effectively, or by cleaning up the statute so that we are clear that it is a civil offence requiring a civil level of proof.

I tabled an amendment to the Anti-social Behaviour Bill in Committee, although I was not on the Committee, hoping at the very least that that matter could be openly debated with the then Minister, but it was blocked by the Government. Will the current Minister take a fresh look at it and, if convinced, introduce a similar amendment while the Bill is in the Lords? That is still possible. As I am sure hon. Members will point out, rafts of new amendments have been introduced to the Anti-social Behaviour Bill and the Criminal Justice Bill. I am sure that, if the Minister wishes to look at the matter seriously, as I know she will, it will be possible to table a simple amendment to ensure that the civil burden of proof is the level required, and to make that absolutely clear to everyone.

I would now like to call witnesses. The deputy chief constable of Nottinghamshire police, Peter Ditchett, remarks:

"We feel that great progress has been made with ASBOs but that more can be done, particularly on the burden of proof."

Another witness is Christine Oliver, the solicitor for Nottingham city council who has responsibility for moving cases forward:

"We would welcome further changes to allow ASBOs to be granted on evidence proved on the balance of probability rather than beyond reasonable doubt. We believe this would allow more applications to be made in both the magistrate's court and county court with broader use of anti-social behaviour orders."

It is not that orders are refused by the courts, but that a vast reservoir of potential orders are never sought because people think that some hurdles are too high. I referred earlier to my next witness, Inspector Jeff Whitmore, who stated:

"We do need the entire burden of proof to be at the civil level to enable all forms of evidence to be submitted and the decision to be made on the balance of probabilities. This as you are aware, will make it far easier for us and the Council to make full use of the legislation."

According to Inspector Whitmore, it is necessary to apply the intention that the Home Secretary has stated in various Second Reading debates and to use antisocial behaviour orders in a way that will help our constituents.

My last witness is the former leader of Nottingham city council, Councillor Graham Chapman, who stated:

"We owe it to the vast majority of law abiding good neighbours to keep the pressure up on the tiny minority of anti-social people by making the burden of proof such that we can actively and speedily take action against them."

My case is not that ASBOs are never granted, but that we need to make them more readily available to the people I have quoted. None is a Rachman. None is trying to kick someone out of a house so that it can be sold. They are all dedicated public servants who wish to use the law as we intended it to be used.

I have been speaking about granting an ASBO, but I shall now deal with the question raised by the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) about breaching an ASBO. I acknowledge openly and honestly to everyone in the Chamber and outside that I am on thin ice. The balance that we are always desperate to achieve in a free society is maintaining good order and decent living conditions for the vast majority of people while in no way compromising individual liberties.

I concur with remarks by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that the balance is tilted in favour of the antisocial person who may hide behind his rights and against the vast majority of law-abiding people in our constituencies. I know that this is a very delicate matter, but, having said that, I shall put on my big clogs and stamp all over it to see what happens and whether there is any room to move forward. I hope that my colleagues will forgive me if I speak bluntly on these matters.

Mrs. Brooke: Is it ever right to risk convicting an innocent young person, or any innocent person? In these circumstances, the risk is so high. Such a conviction would certainly destroy that person's life.

Mr. Allen: There is no intention to convict innocent people, although I admit that innocent people are sometimes convicted under any legal system or system of justice. We should take every possible precaution to prevent that from happening. However, I am equally concerned about the 99 out of 100 innocent people who suffer in their homes because we are unable to find a remedy that will allow them to enjoy their life, privacy and home without being subjected to the antisocial behaviour of young people, bad neighbours or others. It is a question not of innocence or guilt, but of getting the balance right. I am suggesting that perhaps we should tilt the balance a little more in favour of the people who suffer, year after year. Rather than for ever considering the issue in the context of clients who may be represented in court, perhaps we should think of the citizens who have a right to enjoy free association and social life in the way we would all want to enjoy them.

Breaching of many types of orders is a criminal offence. The hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole rightly said that someone can go to prison for five years in certain circumstances. To digress slightly, however, we must explore, if only to reject, the concept of what I call automaticity. Where an order is breached, might it, under carefully defined circumstances, involve an automatic penalty? At present, we need two trials before a penalty is imposed. We need a trial to establish the order and another if it has been breached. We must consider that carefully, as police, probation and housing officers must go through the time-consuming process of preparing and supporting witnesses for court appearances. Automaticity should apply, especially when the original granting of the order required a criminal or quasi-criminal level of proof, although it may not apply in other circumstances. I will leave that thought with the Minister, and I hope that colleagues will take it seriously rather than merely being outraged, saying that we are going to lock up thousands of innocent people. It deserves to be explored, if only for us to reject it collectively around the table.

There is less confusion over ASBOs. We certainly require a criminal level of proof to determine whether they have been breached. To convict someone who has broken their antisocial behaviour order by reappearing in an area from which they were barred, or intimidating families whom they were banned from approaching, the same level of proof is required—as I understand it, although I am not a lawyer—as for murder, rape or any of the most serious offences. That proof must be beyond a shadow of a doubt, beyond all reasonable possibilities. It may well be the law, but we are here not merely to create or to rubber-stamp the law, but to try to support those suffering in our constituencies. I ask hon. Members to think about the issue not as lawyers, but as Members of Parliament whose constituents need action and alternatives to the existing policy. We should not find more reasons to say, "No, we are going to make it difficult for you. We will allow a process to take place that makes it difficult for you to get those necessary orders."

I say to the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole that, normally, by the time we reach that stage, the people are not first-time offenders. They have a track record locally and are at the end of the line. When police, probation and housing resources of that magnitude are committed, it is because the offenders are not casual people whom we are picking up in the streets, but long-term, repeat offenders, many of whom we know through the experiences of our constituents. We are not randomly picking up people off the street and locking them up because we do not like them. Those people have come a long way down the road of antisocial behaviour.

Those are the points that I would like the Minister to clarify. I have been specific, but there is a lot more we can do about antisocial behaviour orders. The Minister will rightly point out the vast amount that the Government have done over recent years, and that effort is genuinely appreciated on the estates in my constituency. The recent developments with the Anti-social Behaviour Bill are welcome. I applaud and pay tribute to those efforts, but they must continue. There are concerns, but whether they are justified is almost beside the point. We need to resolve them whether or not they have any basis. I hope that, in their third and fourth

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terms, the Labour Government will introduce not only a tax on antisocial behaviour, but a serious and solid campaign to promote social behaviour among young people. I have had discussions on the matter with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. I have had conversations on an all-party basis—Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members must be part of getting the process moving—on ensuring that the national curriculum from the age of five reflects social behaviour.

The concepts of emotional intelligence, personal development and self-discipline must be included to give those young people values. That may sound like the nanny state, which may offend middle class people, but there are many kids in my constituency who do not get it at home. It is vital that youngsters learn how to respect each other and how to operate socially. That concept of social behaviour is probably more valuable than any academic or paper qualification that one can obtain after 11 years of schooling and university. To be a decent human being able to interact with one's peers is the greatest gift our education system could give to young people, particularly if they are from a background where they are not getting that encouragement.

Without being prescriptive, I hope that colleagues from all parties will join us and help the Secretary of State for Education and Skills understand how that is an important basis for education. I would also include things such as parenting skills for people who are not yet parents. Children will one day become parents and need to understand what it is like to be a parent and what the responsibilities are. As someone who became a father at a late age, I can say that it is one of the most daunting things that has ever happened to me. I do not have a clue how I would cope if I were a single mum living with a little child in one of the tough estates in my constituency.

Building in an understanding of how to do those things at school level would be a great gift to our fellow citizens. It is also a matter of engaging young people in opportunities for worthwhile activities and setting personal standards that allow them to make something better of their lives. That means proper support for youth clubs, sporting associations, libraries, centres for training and education, leisure, drama and the arts. It means ending the sale of school playing fields, not having children rotating around parks, and allowing caretakers back on sites so that they can look after them. It means more support for local schools that have to cope with damaged and disturbed children to give them the discipline and social skills that they do not have in their home lives.

I hope that our Government will continue the great work that has been started. I hope that they will enjoy the support and the encouragement of other parties in the House. I hope that the Government will continue their twin-track approach of swift penalties for antisocial behaviour and helping those people in our communities who are tackling such problems by cleaving away much of the legal verbiage that surrounds such matters and allowing dedicated public service professionals such as councillors, Members of Parliament and others to make life better for their constituents. As well as swift penalties for antisocial behaviour, there is a raft of things we need to do, leading to swift rewards for improvement. I look forward to the Minister's response.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is advisable for me to remind hon. Members, in case they have not realised, that it is customary in these 90-minute Adjournment debates to commence the first of the three-winding up speeches 30 minutes before termination, which means that we have 31 minutes left for those hon. Members who want to contribute. I ask them to keep that in mind when they make their contributions, or accept and respond to interventions.

9.59 am

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on securing the debate. The antisocial behaviour of a few people has a disproportionate impact on the lives of many of our constituents, and I welcome the opportunity once again to raise their concerns with Ministers.

I recently carried out a detailed survey of my constituents' views on antisocial behaviour, because I was on the Committee that considered the Anti-social Behaviour Bill and wanted their help in getting it right. I promised them that I would use the findings to help with my campaigning, and that I would try my best to make the Government bear them in mind. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister does not think that I am deliberately stalking her, but as she knows after meeting some of my constituents in the House last week, the issue clearly touches a nerve in Mitcham and Morden, and that is borne out by the response to my survey.

Out of about 1,000 questionnaires that I sent out, more than 600 were posted back, an almost unprecedented return rate for a postal survey. I could not get into my office one morning because of the amount of post piled up behind the door, and the results were almost as astonishing. On almost every question, more than 90 per cent. of respondents supported the toughest measures, which include banning the sale of spray paints to under-18s, giving the police powers to move on intimidating gangs of young people and imposing fixed-penalty fines for graffiti on the over-10s. They also want antisocial behaviour notices to apply to troublemakers aged 16 and 17, and possibly to those who are even younger.

My constituents support what the Government are doing, but when one reads their comments one senses their frustration and need for reassurance. They think that we mean well and do not think that we are doing things wrong, but they need reassurance that new laws will be firmly policed, and that there will be a strong chance of the perpetrators being punished. One couple told me:

> "Unfortunately, the reported number of prosecutions for any of these offences is extremely low and, in some cases, non-existent. I believe it is pointless to introduce further legislation which will not be enforced."

Another constituent said:

> "Although I believe that the measures contained in your proposed Bill will help, the most effective deterrent is the probability of being caught and punished".

Whether it is fair or not, my survey revealed that although people believe that the Government are sincere in their intentions and support our proposals, they are sceptical about our ability to deliver.

Even though crime is falling and many of our measures are having an impact, people hear stories about criminals basically getting away with it, and that erodes their trust and belief in the system. They hear stories about the only antisocial behaviour order imposed in Merton—it cost £20,000—on which the courts were extremely lenient when it was breached. No wonder our constituents think that the criminals are taking the mickey out of us.

In contrast, acceptable behaviour contracts cost about £20 each and have an 85 per cent. success rate. It is no wonder that Merton council's partnership against crime prefers to use acceptable behaviour contracts rather than the flagship ASBOs, which are 1,000 times more expensive and have a track record of, "Tried it once, it didn't work."

Sergeant Reeves, the community sergeant at Mitcham police station, and the ASBO and ABC co-ordinator for Merton, has admitted to me that his work has been hampered because until recently there were no standardised procedures for obtaining ASBOs. He said that he was "making it up as he went along". Fortunately, he is now following the guidelines from Coventry police force that were sent to him by the Met, but it is astonishing that good practice in one area takes so long to filter through to others.

Sergeant Reeves is frustrated because the system seems so bureaucratic and inflexible. He told me that it was an "interminable set of meetings". He has to deal with witnesses, housing officers, council staff, registered social landlords and—this often happens last—the victims. Even then, there is no guarantee that the courts will fulfil their side of the bargain. Steve Brennan of Merton partnership against crime has urged me to use this opportunity to ask my hon. Friend the Minister to tell magistrates in the strongest possible terms that ASBOs are not punitive in themselves. MPAC is about to try to obtain its second ASBO, and it does not want a dispiriting experience. It is not applying for an ASBO on a whim, but at the same time ASBOs are not punishments; they are pieces of paper that do no more than commit individuals to behave themselves. Nevertheless, MPAC still felt that for its first ASBO it would need counsel's advice, and a raft of police, housing officers, witnesses and others in the court. What a lot of hassle for a piece of paper—particularly as it is virtually impossible to get people to attend court to tell on their neighbours, especially if they are the neighbours from hell.

As Steve Brennan told me:

"When people dominate an area through fear, not many people are going to testify against them."

The rules of evidence may be a nuisance but, says Sergeant Reeves, so is the lack of flexibility. He believes that the two-year minimum for ASBOs is sometimes too long. That makes magistrates less inclined to grant them, and the authorities less inclined to seek them. A shorter, more focused period might work better.

Then there is the difficulty of what to do if one manages to serve an ASBO, and it is breached. To be fair, neither MPAC nor the local police blame magistrates alone for the failure to take strong action when Merton's only ASBO was breached. They certainly want magistrates to treat breaches more seriously, and to remember that it is possible to impose heavy fines or a five-year prison term, but they also blame other parts of the system. The need to work to a criminal level of proof—beyond reasonable doubt—rather than the balance of probabilities is a disincentive. Merton's first ASBO breach ended frustratingly because social services persuaded magistrates not to take tough action.

I sympathise with constituents who feel that some authorities believe that the perpetrators, rather than the communities that they terrorise, are the victims. We must send out a strong message that that is not so.

It is not all bad news. The introduction of antisocial behaviour orders and parenting orders in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 was a tremendous step forward. It has encouraged local authorities such as Merton to deliver a joined-up response to antisocial behaviour. There have also been outstanding successes such as the neighbourhood warden scheme in my constituency, which on one estate led to a 47 per cent. decrease in the number of call-outs about disorder.

If we are serious, we need to demonstrate to our constituents that, at all levels of criminality, our policies have an impact. That includes improving the framework of antisocial behaviour orders, which not only serve as a deterrent, but, just as importantly, help to reassure people that something is being done. We have to listen to our constituents, one of whom wrote to me:

"I have spoken to various people about this survey who have expressed strong views about the police being asked to enforce measures in the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill. . . .Basically there are a few people in this borough who make life miserable for the rest of us by their behaviour. I feel the only answer is a strong punitive course of action."

ASBOs are an important and useful additional tool for the police and local authorities. Our constituents want the reassurance that they can and will be used, and that they will be effective. On behalf of my constituents, I ask for that reassurance.

10.8 am

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on having secured the debate. We have worked closely, along with the Nottingham press, on legislation concerning fireworks. They, too, are used by yobs to terrify communities. I hope that, with the help of those in another place, progress will be made towards ending that problem.

Antisocial behaviour is a major problem in every constituency. I have not run a survey, but the evidence of my surgeries is that the problem is serious and growing. I have heard it suggested that people act in such a fashion for a number of reasons, including poor housing conditions, lack of facilities for young people, peer pressure and under-age drinking. The community should address under-age drinking, as unscrupulous retailers and off-licences allow young people to buy alcoholic beverages. That contributes greatly to the problem.

We also have gang wars—people from either side of a community deciding to have a good dust-up. The police must deal with that more effectively. The drug culture is

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a major problem. A feeling of belonging, of being part of a team or group, sometimes provides impetus for becoming involved in antisocial behaviour. Parents are often completely helpless and unable to deal with their children's problems.

We must examine how we deal with such problems, their causes and the reasons why people of all ages are often frustrated and angry at what they see as the inactivity of the police, the councils and us politicians. It has been said that aggressive neighbours, loud music, drug dealing and rowdy children all contribute to the hell that people suffer in such communities. The elderly especially feel trapped in their homes; they are frightened to open the blinds or to look out of their windows. However, the problem is not confined to them, and many people tell us of their experiences.

Damage to property is another major issue, but challenges to such behaviour often rebound on the individuals who make them. A constituent of mine heard a noise at 3 o'clock in the morning, went to his window and saw two youths breaking into a neighbour's car. He went to the front door and chased them off, but within half an hour of getting back into bed, a brick was thrown through his front window. That behaviour is totally unacceptable but very difficult to deal with.

The problem is nationwide, and it is important that we examine how we are dealing with it. I hope to signal briefly how that might be done. Antisocial behaviour orders are a powerful weapon, and I trust that all hon. Members recognise their value. If they are not working as effectively as they should, the Minister will need to see whether we can learn from the experience of others, and make the changes necessary to ensure that they are effective.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North highlighted the standard of proof necessary to obtain an antisocial behaviour order. I understand his concerns, but I suggest that changes could be made that would strengthen such orders. Criminal justice in Scotland is devolved. I want to consider the tackling of antisocial behaviour in my constituency. Section 83 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003 requires Scottish local authorities to have an antisocial behaviour strategy. I am proud to say that, over the past two years, South Lanarkshire council has worked effectively to deal with the problems experienced by its constituents. It created an antisocial behaviour unit, staffed by four ex-policemen and led by John McKenzie.

Whenever I come across a major problem in my surgery, I contact John. The unit visits the locality, and talks to the individuals. The fact that the unit is in the area often quietens the problems that residents are experiencing. If it does not, the unit gets everyone in the neighbourhood to fill in a diary of the events that are causing the problem. The unit then visits the individuals who are causing the problem. I have found that approach to be very effective.

If no notice is taken of the unit's visit, the council will evict people. South Lanarkshire council employs three solicitors to ensure that its case for eviction is strong, that it is taken through the courts as quickly as possible and that it is dealt with effectively. Hon. Members cannot imagine how the community responds to such action. When successful, it sends out the signal to those who are causing the disruption that their behaviour is unacceptable.

Mr. Allen: When my hon. Friend speaks on these matters, we all listen, not least because of his great experience in promoting the Fireworks Bill. I thank him for his tribute to the local newspaper campaign in Nottingham.

I am very interested in the Scottish dimension. I am one of those MPs who believe that the presence here of our Scottish and Welsh colleagues, unlike other colleagues whom we could talk about, adds to the richness of our British Parliament. Will my hon. Friend tell us about the tenancy agreement that he mentioned in relation to antisocial behaviour? He may not know the answer off the top of his head, but is the council empowered to evict people using a slightly faster-track process than the one that many English councils have? The process used by English councils is almost as protracted as the antisocial behaviour order process itself. Some of us would view such a capacity, if Scottish councils have it, with great envy and jealousy.

Mr. Tynan: We obviously do not have a perfect system either, but I believe that we have the correct way of ensuring that we are dealing seriously with the problem. The council cannot evict: eviction requires a court order. We do, however, have a dedicated unit that can examine the problems, identify the culprits and the antisocial behaviour, and pass that information to the council. The council then examines it to see whether there is a strong enough case. I should add that members of the antisocial behaviour unit will be the witnesses in the case, not the individual neighbours who feel threatened. That has been successful in several cases, and it sends a very strong signal. I will be delighted to talk in depth to my hon. Friend about that, as I am sure will the council.

Problems with the system remain, and I suspect that England and Wales, not just Scotland, experience many of them. Consideration needs to be given to the legal process and fast-tracking, because the major problem with antisocial behaviour is that people become frustrated if it is not dealt with quickly enough. They feel let down after having been through the whole process, which is why the antisocial behaviour unit has been so successful.

A weakness remains in other areas, which the Minister could address if we changed the system slightly. Interim orders give provision for tackling the problem, but current delays of up to a year are unacceptable. An application that takes that long to pass through the court sends completely the wrong signals. The other problem is that an application is usually made with the help of legal aid, which makes it very expensive for the council to pursue the case.

The Scottish Executive recently proposed how to strengthen the system in Scotland. We can learn from each other. I am a United Kingdom MP and I will vote on UK matters, which I hope people will recognise is important. I also hope, however, that the Minister is closely following the Scottish experience and considering whether it can be applied in England and Wales. I also hope that the Executive will closely follow

our discussion today. Many of our problems are the same as Scotland's, and I hope that the ideas that may be piloted, such as fast-tracking antisocial behaviour orders through the courts in less than a month, could be applied widely.

Antisocial behaviour orders are a useful tool for tackling the nuisance behaviour that blights so many of our communities. As such, I believe that the Government can have notable success with them. Weaknesses and teething troubles remain, but I hope that in response to the debate the Minister will commit herself to considering a package of measures that might make the orders more effective in confronting people who engage in antisocial behaviour. I hope that best practice can be examined and implemented. If it is, I believe that it will make a major difference to the people we represent.

10.18 am

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen). I might not agree with everything that he said, but it would be helpful if the Minister provided the clarification that the hon. Gentleman is seeking. It is worth establishing where the confusion that undoubtedly exists lies, and how it arose.

I very much welcomed the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. As hon. Members will know, I am committed to the local crime and disorder reduction partnerships. I sincerely believe that we need local solutions for local problems. I will not bore the Chamber with my many views on that, but I am passionate about a problem-solving approach.

Interestingly, *The Guardian* published a large article on Saturday, as it did on three other days last week, about the war on crime. The article discussed some of the Government's policies. It concluded that there was a shift from preventative measures towards punishment. *The Guardian* was complimentary about the measures that were first introduced, and specifically mentioned the Crime and Disorder Act. It is important to remember that local initiatives need funding, and local priorities need to be determined locally. That is fair. Although I am in favour of certain targets, it is important that all targets mean something to the people who implement them. That sets the background for what I would like to say.

I want to put it firmly on the record that I am committed to tackling antisocial behaviour. I have been involved in a great deal of work with young people and I am committed to the idea that we must all have respect for and value one another. However, as I have said many times, we need to intervene early enough. One of my greatest fears is that young people will get on to the conveyer belt of crime, and we must try to prevent that. That does not mean that I am not protective of other people, but prevention must be high among our priorities.

I can rattle off a number of excellent Government initiatives, which I praise. I meet many people at my surgeries, and my concern is that people in my part of the world want direct draconian measures to be put in place for relatively minor situations. For example, one of my constituents is continually having his fence damaged. That is an enormous problem for him, but going straight to issuing an ASBO is not the solution. It is a difficult situation.

I want to highlight particular problems in my constituency. In the borough of Poole, there are no street wardens or neighbourhood wardens. In the eastern half of the Dorset county council area, there are no community support officers. Whatever measures are put in place, it is difficult to implement them without people on the ground or a deterrent. Dorset is probably the safest part of the country, so it is not surprising that we do not see police around in large numbers. Many people can go weeks without seeing a police officer. In areas such as my constituency, we need civilian support, particularly as a lot of disorder—if I can call it that—is lower-level antisocial behaviour.

I always think that we have to appreciate that ASBOs are just one weapon in the armoury, not an end in themselves. I always get distressed when I see authorities almost competing with each other to see who has the greatest number of ASBOs. That does not mean that an authority is more efficient and effective at controlling antisocial behaviour. I know that I have quoted the following example before, but it was quoted in the White Paper that preceded the Police Reform Bill:

> "In Wrexham, for example, just one order has been made, but the real measure of success is the 1,500 or so incidents that have been resolved through partnership working before an ASBO had to be used."

We must put the issue into perspective. I am in favour of a staged approach with early intervention and warnings. I am exceedingly pleased that it was the Liberal Democrat council in Islington that came up with the idea of acceptable behaviour contracts. They were, of course, a by-product of ASBOs, so everybody can take some credit.

An ASBO must be accompanied by measures to change behaviour. It seems pointless to say, "Stop, stop, stop," particularly with young people. All measures must be monitored and evaluated to see what works in a particular area.

We sometimes ask what on earth antisocial behaviour is because it is such a diverse, catch-all term. Many hon. Members have given examples related to housing, but we also face quite different issues. I am sure that my area does not have as many problems as inner-city areas represented by other hon. Members, but what I see still makes me angry. My local crime and disorder reduction partnership should be in there sorting things out and at least imposing acceptable behaviour contracts, because many neighbours are experiencing great distress, as we have heard.

In my area, there are problems with alcohol. It is a fairly affluent area. Fireworks are a huge problem, because there is plenty of money to buy them. I therefore congratulate the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on introducing his private Member's Bill. It is always a huge success for an hon. Member to introduce such a Bill, but that is particularly true when the Bill is wanted so much throughout the country. The hon. Gentleman deserves the greatest credit for introducing the Fireworks Bill, which I supported every inch of the way. In that respect, I would not like to think that I was described as being soft on antisocial behaviour.

We need effective measures, and I favour antisocial behaviour orders as a weapon of last resort. Of course, they must sometimes be used earlier, and that seems to

[Mrs. Annette L. Brooke]

happen more and more in cases of really bad behaviour. I favour ASBOs over dispersal orders, which I oppose in their current form. ASBOs are targeted at an individual, and specific misbehaviour must be proved. A dispersal order applies to a group, and its use can be triggered by people's mere presence in an area rather than by their behaviour. Leaving aside the human rights issues, such orders can have perverse consequences. Moving young people on makes them think, "No one wants us round here." As a result, they may go off and do even worse things in another area. I therefore have sound reasons for opposing dispersal orders. I would prefer us to use a range of other supportive, positive and diversionary measures as part of a package to tackle antisocial behaviour.

It is interesting that the Government undertook a complete evaluation of ASBOs. I read their report when it came out in January 2002, and it contained many lessons. The conclusion states:

"The overall opinion in the areas visited was generally positive. When used effectively, ASBOs have been successful in curbing unruly behaviour, have helped rebuild the quality of life in communities and cemented good relationships both between partner agencies and between these agencies and the community."

Of course, there were reservations about delays, excessive bureaucracy and, sometimes, the fact that partnership working was not too good. However, we can work on all those things.

Many changes were made after the evaluation, as the Government responded to earlier difficulties with ASBOs, and we now have interim ASBOs. We also have post-conviction orders, although I was rather wary of them, because it seemed that we were giving people two punishments for the same offence. However, my local police have greatly welcomed them. ASBOs have been extended to housing associations and the British Transport police, and other extensions are included in the Anti-social Behaviour Bill, which is coming on stream. I repeat that I would be much happier if all the agencies that could apply for ASBOs were tied into the local partnership, because the wider picture—the quality of the local environment—will not be considered unless everyone works together.

I want to give a quote from the White Paper that preceded the Police Reform Bill to highlight the important point about the debate:

"In the light of these findings, the Home Office will streamline the procedures involved in obtaining an ASBO and develop a national procedure for obtaining, deploying and targeting ASBOs, backed up by the most suitable step by step warning system".

We want to know how good practice is being spread. What plans are in place to evaluate the effects of the changes introduced by what is now the Police Reform Act 2002? We need to consider such issues all the time, because it is not worth having a weapon that is not working particularly well.

To conduct an evaluation, I got my researcher to ring a few councils to see how they were getting on with the new measures. I shall be brief and refer to the councils by their initials, so that I do not embarrass them, but their comments were interesting. Council I has so far issued two ASBOs using the new powers in the 2002 Act; one was post-conviction, the other an interim ASBO. That council welcomes the new powers, which have greatly facilitated the use of ASBOs. The multi-agency approach is important, but the main reason that council I has not used many is because of the success of acceptable behaviour contracts and the successful work with multiple agencies.

Council H was rather interesting—it was referred to in one of our debates on the Anti-social Behaviour Bill. For various reasons, it has to date not issued any ASBOs, notably because it does not have a dedicated antisocial behaviour unit co-ordinator. I thought that councils had to have one; at least I recall reading that in some guidance. However, that council did not have its own housing stock, so there was a less pressing need locally. Again, it is deceptive to quote only the numbers. When, or indeed if, that council establishes a dedicated antisocial behaviour co-ordinator post, it will definitely use ASBOs more extensively.

Mr. Allen: Did the hon. Lady telephone Nottingham city council? After the Liberal Democrats' vote in Parliament against the Anti-social Behaviour Bill, the Liberal group on Nottingham city council split, and half of them became independent. Did she speak to them?

Mrs. Brooke: I certainly would have done so, had they contacted me. They would undoubtedly have understood why we voted against that Bill at that stage in the process. We are opposed to the dispersal orders, but we have never opposed ASBOs.

Briefly, council S is an interesting case. It has implemented 22 ASBOs, plus five interim ASBOs, and used acceptable behaviour contracts extensively—it had 136 in 2002–03. It has a strong multi-agency group that meets to discuss each ASBO and has not lost one yet. Each application is a rock solid case, and that sends an important message. I apologise for taking time on that, but those were quite interesting comments.

Hon. Members have referred to witnesses, and in the evaluation there is a lot of advice about witness protection and alternative ways of getting the evidence presented. What is the Minister doing to spread best practice on supporting witnesses?

This debate is about the level of proof, and I thought that I had got my head around that, but then I listened to the Minister's reply during questions on Monday. There is one issue on which I am not clear, so I would be grateful if she clarified matters. As I see the matter, there are two tests—that the individual concerned has acted in a certain manner, and that the ASBO is necessary to protect persons in that local government area from further antisocial acts. It has been suggested that the burden of proof on the first test should be to the higher civil or criminal standard, whereas the second aspect is an evaluation. However, the Minister said to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North that

"the orders are civil orders, and that the civil standard of evidence is therefore admissible."—[*Official Report*, 14 July 2003; Vol. 409, c. 12.]

As a non-lawyer, I am now confused and would be grateful for clarification on that point.

As for a breach, I am clear what the burden of proof should be, and I would not favour an automatic penalty—young people often go off the rails for all sorts of family reasons—because the worst scenario horrifies me.

I welcome much that the Government are doing to tackle antisocial behaviour, but we need to get the right balance between prevention and punishment. We should involve young people in solutions in the community. For example, when there is a breach, a community sentence is much better than a prison sentence, especially for a younger person. Why not let other young people determine that community sentence and what it should involve?

10.34 am

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I will deal first with the points that have arisen this morning. It is clear that great concern remains. Several MPs have made powerful contributions to the debate about the level of antisocial behaviour.

I disagree with the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) that the judiciary is unaware of antisocial behaviour or is cocooned away from it. Antisocial behaviour takes place in the area where I live. I suspect that it also takes place in the areas where judges live, around London or outside it, and affects them in the same way as it affects people elsewhere, although not necessarily to the same degree as it affects the hon. Gentleman's constituents. In many areas of the law, most judges' or barristers' professional careers are spent listening day after day to examples of antisocial behaviour that would make one's hair stand on end. Therefore, I do not think that the problem is that the judiciary is out of touch.

The hon. Gentleman raised a specific and highly pertinent issue. As he knows, the Conservative party was prepared to welcome ASBOs, although we had some grave reservations about how they would work in practice. Is the problem with ASBOs that the test for obtaining them in court is too high? That is the specific matter that he raised, and I will deal with it before making general comments.

I must say bluntly to the hon. Gentleman that I do not think that the Government have any leeway on the matter. They incorporated the European convention on human rights into our law. I do not see how the nature of ASBOs can be reconciled with their being obtained, either initially or for their breach, on anything other than an elevated standard of proof. I do not blame the Human Rights Act 1998 for that elevated standard, but even before it, it had long been the practice that a standard of proof other than the balance of probabilities had to be used in civil court proceedings where the judge made decisions of grave importance to a person's reputation, or made findings against a person that were tantamount to a criminal offence. The hon. Gentleman understands that. He cited the McCann case, in which Lord Steyn made it clear in the House of Lords that, in cases relating to whether an ASBO should be imposed, there had to be a heightened civil standard because of the seriousness of the matters involved. Picking up on the point made by the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke), as I understand it, the heightened civil standard relates to the acts committed by the person concerned, which give rise to the ASBO being granted.

The House of Lords said in the McCann case that the heightened civil standard and the criminal standard of proof are virtually indistinguishable, which is true and was stated previously by Lord Bingham. In those circumstances, therefore, it would be sensible for magistrates to apply the criminal standard of proof, which would be simpler than engaging in a convoluted exercise and would be the best way to proceed.

Vera Baird (Redcar): Surely there is nothing in article 6 to oblige the British courts to adopt the criminal standard of proof in civil proceedings.

Mr. Grieve: I entirely agree, but I am bound to say that it would be contrary to evolving civil practice to deal with a matter of such seriousness on the balance of probabilities irrespective of the Human Rights Act. I think that, although there is nothing to specify it, it would be left open to a challenge because of its nature.

That picks up on the point made by the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh). She said that the ASBO is only a piece of paper. The trouble is that it is not only a piece of paper. If it were only a piece of paper, matters might be rather different. The piece of paper frequently has written on it requirements for observance that are a curtailment of individual liberties. I think of the first ASBO granted in my own constituency after quite a lot of pressure from me, apart from anyone else.

The ASBO was issued to a tearaway 16-year-old girl who terrorised the local inhabitants of Burnham in my constituency. She moved in on an 80-year old and lived in his flat, milking his bank account of some £10,000 in circumstances that gave rise to possible duress. Her misbehaviour and violence were such that when she was arrested by the police they hardly ever took her to the police station: they tended to take her to the casualty department of the local hospital because of the damage she did inside police vans. The ASBO provided for restrictions on where she could go within the locality. That is not just a piece of paper. It may be proportionate, and civil injunctions may be granted in such a way, but it imposed a number of clear and important conditions.

Vera Baird: I am conscious that the hon. Gentleman has only a short time, so he is being generous in giving way. He has got to the crux of the issue. The civil standard of proof is applied in cases where no quasi-criminal act is alleged and the penalties for such a breach can follow. Applying the civil standard of proof, one can make injunctions and restrictions on freedom just as hard as one would if one adopted voluntarily the criminal standard of proof. What on earth is the point of making it harder for people to get antisocial behaviour orders? My point applies to issues such as access to children where allegations of domestic violence have been made. Those cases have to be judged on the criminal standard and make a just outcome much more difficult to achieve.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. and learned Lady makes a good point. It is also right that one cannot get a civil injunction on the balance of probabilities against someone under 18. That is part of the difficulty and one of the problems that ASBOs were designed to address.

[Mr. Grieve]

Protection of the rights of minors is important. The hon. and learned Lady may be right, but I do not share her confidence about the Human Rights Act compatibility.

Mr. Allen: The hon. Gentleman is saying that we are bound by the evolution of civil law. I believe that statute law and parliamentary sovereignty—if one believes in that myth—would allow this place to make its view clear and influence the direction of law. People will not be impressed to hear someone citing the evolution of civil law. If the European convention can overturn the provisions, let us put that to the test. The Government should be on the right side of the argument by not allowing Europe to do that.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman makes another interesting point. Parliament could decide that such orders should be granted on the balance of probabilities. My next question is whether that would make such a difference. We need to consider that important matter. The principal difficulty in obtaining ASBOs is that one is collating a large number of acts, often using hearsay evidence—it is worth bearing it in mind that hearsay evidence can be used—to present a picture to the court of the unpleasant activities of a person, which may not be enough evidence to prosecute them for those acts. Even if that picture were being painted only on the balance of probabilities, it would still require bringing the witnesses to court to support those assertions.

My impression of ASBOs—we warned the Government about this—is that the difficulty being experienced is that they involve a labour-intensive and bureaucratic process that can go wrong because witnesses do not turn up because they feel intimidated, as the hon. Member for Nottingham, North said. However, they will feel just as intimidated whether they are coming to give evidence to satisfy a court on the balance of probabilities, or whether they are coming to give evidence to satisfy the court, so that it is sure that someone has done something. I see the hon. and learned Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) grimace and I appreciate the point that she is silently trying to communicate to me. There are grey areas in cases, where the court may feel that there has been sufficient evidence to be satisfied on the balance of probabilities but not to make it sure. That might include cases where some key witnesses fail to turn up, but others are present. I should be very interested in a little survey of how ASBOs are failing in reality, because I am by no means persuaded that they are failing once they get to court with witnesses. I shall be interested to hear from the Minister on that. I think that the problem has simply been that they have turned out to be far more bureaucratic and cumbersome to obtain than the Government envisaged. I do not think that changing the test of the standard of proof would make a difference.

If I had more time, I would tell the Chamber about another point that has clearly emerged: it is all very well having ASBOs, but unless we have the means of enforcement, we will not go far. I believe that the principal problem is a lack of adequate policing. Various examples have been cited of huge improvements brought to areas by neighbourhood initiatives. I am sure that that is right, involving people out on the street. We need to concentrate on that, as well as on obtaining orders against individuals. Without that, the orders are nothing but bits of paper that turn out in practice to do little for the local community.

A couple of weeks ago, I woke up and went outside to find that the front door area of my house had been graffitied. That was extremely irritating. I have no idea who did it and have not the slightest means of apprehending them. I did not even complain to the police. It was clear that it had taken place fairly liberally down my street. That is the sort of event that puts people in fear and makes them feel that an area is deteriorating. Unless there is some way of seeing a police officer out on the streets, which in my part of London does not happen frequently, we will not be able to start to make an impact on such problems.

I shall be interested to hear the Minister's comments and, specifically, I should like an update from her on how many ASBOs have been granted or obtained. However, I hope that the hon. Member for Nottingham, North understands that, although I am deeply sympathetic to his points and his wish for something to be done, I have a question mark over whether changing the standard of proof would deliver what he wants.

10.48 am

The Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety (Ms Hazel Blears): In the fairly short time available, I shall try to deal with the points that hon. Members have made. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on securing the debate on an issue that resonates throughout the country in every constituency. We all know the depth of misery and anguish that many of our constituents have experienced. Hearing the tale of his constituents, to whom he has dedicated the debate, sets the scene for all of us.

My hon. Friend made interesting suggestions on how he feels about the position. I shall respond to the particular issues that he raised. He suggested that we could have post-legislative scrutiny of how well the powers are working. Although I am not necessarily attracted to that specific idea, as to how the powers have evolved, there is constant scrutiny of where they are working and where there are difficulties—hurdles and barriers—as we try to build knowledge about how to make the orders even more effective in practice.

Hon. Members may know that we have recently established the antisocial behaviour unit in the Home Office, which is a new development. It will receive £75 million in funding over the next three years, ensure that the powers are implemented in local areas and provide a central resource for practitioners, who may be experiencing some difficulties in relation to evidence, proof or practice. It will draw together the good guidelines mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) and ensure that people are not reinventing the wheel when they use the powers in their communities. The unit will provide us with a system of measuring and evaluating how well the powers are working.

I certainly do not feel that my hon. Friend, who has a tremendous track record in this area, is putting me under undue pressure and I was delighted to meet her constituents in the House last week. They reaffirmed just

how right the Government are to make tackling antisocial behaviour a top political priority, because it is clearly a priority for people in her community. I am concerned that Mitcham and Morden has found it difficult to obtain ASBOs. We now have a support group of experienced practitioners and we can put those people in touch with Mitcham and Morden to provide advice, support and the means of tackling some of the hurdles.

On the cost of ASBOs, it is fair to say that, initially, they were expensive, because people did not really have a full grasp of the range of evidence that it was necessary to collect. I understand that the average cost of obtaining an order is now about £1,000, which makes an order a fairly cost-effective remedy. When people seek more orders, they have standardised documentation and are not starting from scratch. The cost gets cheaper the more orders are used.

I understand that the latest figure for the number of ASBOs granted is 1,112. More than 200 orders were granted between the judgment in the House of Lords case last October and this March. Clearly, there is no evidence that that judgment has had a practical impact and is preventing orders from being granted. Although I have listened to what hon. Members have said about the burden of proof, and although it is a fascinating discussion, the fact that the law is now clear and that magistrates are clear about what they need to find in such cases is not militating against the granting of orders.

There is a case for saying that the messages need to be clearer, that information for magistrates needs to be strengthened, that magistrates need more training from the Judicial Studies Board and that we need proper sentencing guidelines, so that magistrates know how seriously such matters are taken in their communities and what burden of proof they need to look for. However, at this stage, I have no evidence to indicate that orders are not being sought or granted because of the heightened burden of proof that is necessary.

Vera Baird: The Minister says that that is not causing a problem with ASBOs. I cannot comment on that, but the matter causes enormous problems in domestic violence cases.

The Government decided that ASBO proceedings should be civil. How do they feel about the judges disagreeing and deciding that proceedings should be criminal?

Ms Blears: I take issue with my hon. and learned Friend. The judges did not decide that the matter is criminal. The judgment makes it clear that we are talking about civil orders and civil proceedings. That brings me to one of the points made by the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke). What I sought to say in my answer at Home Office questions was that the orders are civil. The burden of proof for the first limb of the application—whether there has been antisocial behaviour—is of a heightened civil level, equivalent to the criminal burden of proof. The second limb of the application is whether the order should be granted. Throughout the proceedings, because they are civil, hearsay evidence and professional witnesses are admissible. That enables us to do the very thing that the orders were designed to do—ensure that local people are not necessarily put in the firing line in those difficult circumstances. We can continue to use civil evidence, such as hearsay, which has proved so vital in ensuring that orders are granted.

Mr. Allen: I think that the Minister is saying that there is not an issue of substance, but there is perhaps an issue of communication. Practitioners are undoubtedly not seeking orders. Once they seek them, they get them, but they do not seek them to the extent that I or perhaps the Minister would like. It is a matter of clarity. Will she undertake to ensure that not only magistrates, but all practitioners receive her clear advice about judges' decisions in those cases? Then, they will seek and take out more antisocial behaviour orders.

Ms Blears: I am delighted to give my hon. Friend that undertaking. It is important that there is more communication on issues that apply to practitioners to give them the self-confidence to say, "We have a situation of antisocial behaviour, we have a whole range of tools at our disposal." The tools range from acceptable behaviour contracts to diversionary work. Where an antisocial behaviour order is the appropriate remedy, practitioners should feel confident in making the application and supporting the victim and witnesses throughout the process. That will ensure that they obtain the order and that it is enforced if it is subsequently breached. I accept that we must communicate more, and the antisocial behaviour unit will help us to do that.

I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) on fireworks. He has done a sterling job with tenacity and determination, and I hope that the Fireworks Bill gets a fair wind in the other place. He mentioned the idea of having a dedicated antisocial behaviour unit at a local level. I have one in my constituency and there is an excellent one at Manchester city council. In those areas, the gaining of orders has continued apace. In my constituency, about 16 have been attached to convictions. That is one of the new powers brought in by the Police Reform Act 2002. Increasingly, orders on conviction are proving extremely attractive because there has been a trial. Witnesses do not have to go through the ordeal of a trial again to obtain an order. It can be attached to the conviction based on the evidence heard. That is proving an extremely useful weapon.

We now have the idea of interim orders so, when a situation arises, people can go to court straight away and secure urgent action. My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South said that it takes up to a year to obtain orders. That concerns me, and the powers to obtain an interim order are therefore important. The powers to obtain orders in the county court and attach them to housing proceedings will also make them more effective. All those powers exemplify how the Government have learned from practical experience and recognised the difficulties that communities have had. We have responded by introducing those extra powers.

Despite the undoubted enthusiasm for tackling antisocial behaviour of the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole, I am disappointed that she and her party were unable to support the proposals in the Anti-social Behaviour Bill. She will live to regret that

[Ms Blears]

decision, and I think that her constituents would have wanted her to support its powers to tackle antisocial behaviour. I hope that she and her party will have a rethink as the Bill proceeds through Parliament.

The hon. Lady asked about evaluation. At the moment, the new powers are being used well. A quarter of the 200 orders made in the past year have been made on conviction. The geographical extension of orders across England and Wales has been granted to prevent people from crossing borders to escape the strictures of their order. County court ASBOs were introduced only in April and some have already been granted. Practitioners are taking up the new powers extremely enthusiastically. We are not in a position where the House of Lords' legal judgment has militated against the granting of orders. Improving communication, spreading good practice, ensuring that we do not reinvent the wheel in every community and trying to get orders through quickly are all important.

ASBOs are one of the tools introduced by the Government. The decision to tackle those matters in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 was bold and courageous. In response to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), who said that we need adequate policing, we now have 132,268 police officers, which is a record. We have nearly 1,400 community support officers and 5,000 more police officers than when we came to power in 1997. That is the Government's record on policing.

We have taken bold and courageous steps to tackle antisocial behaviour. We believe that it is at the top of communities' priorities. We will continue to ensure that people are able to live free from fear in safe communities and to go about their lawful business without the prospect of being attacked and harassed in the way that far too many of our fellow citizens are today.

Teenage Pregnancy

11 am

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise an issue that is of great importance to my constituency. Teenage pregnancy is not an easy issue for Members of Parliament or the Government to tackle. There are all kinds of sensitivities around teenage pregnancies, particularly for families and individuals with deeply held religious beliefs, so we must tackle the subject with great care. I welcome the work of the social exclusion unit and the Government's programmes to tackle teenage pregnancy. There is no simple solution to reducing teenage pregnancy rates, but we must find solutions, however difficult that may be.

Teenage pregnancy is both a symptom and a cause of social exclusion, and tackling it may be one of the keys to breaking the terrible cycle of poverty trickling down the generations, which I often see in the area that I represent. In my constituency, we have a problem with teenage pregnancy, and a more worrying problem of teenage pregnancy among asylum seekers from countries of conflict who have been raped.

Younger girls from poorer areas are more likely to become pregnant. In a deprived environment, extra support is required for teenage parents to break the cycle of teen pregnancy. Teenage years should be the time when people begin to fulfil their potential and graduate to adulthood. How is that possible if they have the responsibility of bringing up kids?

Responding to a written question in July, the Department told me that the most recent Government data for 2001 show a 10 per cent. reduction in the under-18 conception rate and an 11 per cent. reduction in the under-16 rate since 1998. I agree with the Government that the signs are encouraging, but we need to do more. We must ensure that proper information and education about sex and relationships are available to young people, and that more support is available, especially for particularly vulnerable groups such as refugee women who have been sexually abused and are pregnant when they arrive in Britain.

Enfield's teenage pregnancy co-ordinator, Debbie Young, with whom I have worked closely in preparing for this debate, informed me that in 1999 the under-18 and under-16 conception rates decreased, but that since 2000 both have increased. There was a 14 per cent. increase in the under-18 conception rate between 2000 and 2001, and a 39 per cent. increase in the under-16 rate between 1999 and 2000. In addition, the proportion of conceptions leading to abortion increased to 60 per cent. in 2000 from an average of 52 per cent. in the two preceding years.

There is a desperate need for a young people's sexual health and contraception service in my constituency, which has the highest teenage conception rates in the borough of Enfield, as well as the highest levels of gonorrhoea and chlamydia. At present, one of the two weekly young people's sexual health and contraception sessions in Enfield is funded with a teenage pregnancy grant, but the local primary care trust is unable to provide mainstream funding to enable teenage pregnancy finance to be directed to new and innovative pilot projects in my constituency. Sexual health is a priority for Enfield PCT, but there is no national service

framework for sexual health, and funding is not directed at such issues. The PCT argues that although non-recurrent extra funding has been provided, it is grossly inadequate and, because it is non-recurrent, it is impossible to establish new services to meet the demands and diverse needs of the community.

The strain is very obvious. The teenage parents support project in Enfield has had 204 referrals since it started in October 2002, but it has only one outreach caseworker, who works four days a week. Most of the young people seen are 15, 16 or 17 years old. That tells us that many children of school age are far from knowledgeable about sex and sexual health. The image often portrayed that teenagers are sexually active and well informed about the birds and the bees is far from the truth.

The editor of *Exposure*, a local magazine for young people, recently told me that the principal reason why young people do not access advice services is that they are not usually promoted in a way that is appealing to young people.

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): I agree with my hon. Friend that education is extremely important. I am originally from the Netherlands. One thing that is different there, besides education, is that parents, families and so on frown on teenage pregnancy. That is an important reason for the rate of teenage pregnancy being so low in the Netherlands.

Mr. Love: I shall come to the European experience a little later, but my hon. Friend is absolutely correct in saying that the rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe, particularly the Netherlands, is much lower than in this country.

The editor of *Exposure* magazine told me:

"Remember that young people have been born and brought up in the information age. Commercial organisations promoting products and services to young people use very sophisticated ways of getting their messages across through film, music, pop-videos and glossy magazines. To stand any chance of getting noticed by young people, government backed promotions on sexual health must compete for attention against commercial communications. What the Government produces must be of an extremely high calibre and equally sophisticated."

He continued:

"The reason magazines like Exposure have any kind of impact on young people is that we are not talking down to them. It's young people themselves, encouraged and guided by adults that are given the freedom to write and produce the magazine to get important messages across to their peers."

Siobhan Phillander, a 16-year-old reporter for the magazine, confirmed that when she said:

"Since coming to Exposure I've made friends, I've written articles about TV shows, crime and teenage pregnancy. I've learnt to write. Before I couldn't be bothered to even write a letter! I've seen young people come in and say what they want to say and how they want to say it instead of being on the streets making mischief."

Responding to a written question in June, the Department confirmed that the teenage pregnancy strategy national campaign, which was launched in October last year, involved advertisements aimed at 13-year-old boys and girls in popular teenage magazines and on local independent radio stations. The Minister said that the early success of the campaign was recognised in the first annual report of the independent advisory group on teenage pregnancy and that since October the free telephone advice line had advised more than 8 million young people and that, importantly, half of them were boys.

The Minister will be aware of the work of the Royal College of General Practitioners, which is working closely with the teenage pregnancy unit to provide training and resources to support GPs in making their practices more teenage friendly. I urge him to reinforce that important work by including and engaging young people in it.

Involving young people, including their ideas, creativity and personal experiences, in national media campaigns is critical. There is a wealth of initiative and innovative ideas among young people in my area, but their opportunities to have any input to national campaigns to make them more relevant to them are limited. That is particularly relevant locally, where a high proportion of young people come from black and ethnic minority communities, many of which are not represented in national campaign material. I strongly urge the Minister to look carefully at that important issue and would welcome his feedback.

Last year, a UNICEF report told us that the UK had not made enough progress in tackling teenage pregnancy and that the UK had the highest teenage pregnancy rate in the developed world. However, the House of Commons Library confirmed that the rate of teenage births has fallen over the past 30 years by almost 40 per cent. Does the Minister agree that we must find new ways to prevent teenage pregnancies and to help young mothers in teenage pregnancy blackspots? Furthermore, investment in new strategies must be directed specifically to tackle the unique issues in each area.

A local health visitor in my area told me about some cases in her current work load, which show her clients' diverse and complex histories:

"C is 16 years old and from Uganda. She witnessed her family members killed. She was raped and fled to England. C attended local family planning services to request a termination but this was not possible as the pregnancy was too advanced. She remains ambivalent about the pregnancy and at times feels hostile towards the baby. C requires support for all areas of her life, to be given appropriate advice and information and enabled to make informative choices. She is indeed a child in need herself."

Living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation can be extremely isolating for a teenager who has been raped and is an asylum seeker. She is often unable to access crucial advice services.

Such young women have experienced incredibly traumatic situations and require specific services, which current arrangements do not provide. Will the Minister examine new measures to help and protect that vulnerable group and to meet its specific needs? English is not the first language of many such women, and they can expect only one visit from a caseworker once the baby is born.

Does the Minister agree that extra clarity is needed on where the funding and additional support services will come from? Asylum seekers in the UK who are victims of rape are also victims of torture and should be treated accordingly. There is one outreach caseworker in Enfield, who works for four days a week with 204

[Mr. Love]

pregnant teenagers. Does the Minister agree that that is not enough and that we must ensure that new money gets through to the cutting edge of service delivery to increase capacity in those crucial services?

One of the main concerns of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is that teenage parents should receive support and help, which will in turn help their children. Its 2001 report, "Improving Children's Health", found that much work on teenage pregnancy is focused on preventing pregnancies rather than supporting teenage parents. It believes that it is vital to support teenage parents to end the cycle of poverty and misery, which often occurs. It found that teenage mothers' babies are generally vulnerable and that the mothers are more likely to suffer post-natal depression. The NSPCC supports complementary services and a co-ordinated, cross-departmental approach, which the Minister might comment on today.

To sum up, the Government are clearly committed to tackling teenage pregnancy, which is reflected in the significant increase in expenditure from £5 million in 1999 to £21 million in 2002. I welcome their plans on educational advice and the approach adopted by the social exclusion unit, which is working across Departments. We have the worst teenage pregnancy rate in Europe and many such women in my constituency are confused, isolated and afraid. We should be doing more to reach them. Teenage pregnancy is prevalent among the poorest sections of the community. Other risk factors include being in care, being excluded from school, having mental health problems and having experienced sexual abuse. We must try to prevent young people from becoming pregnant, but if they have a baby we should support them. We also need to learn from our partners in Europe, who have much lower teenage pregnancy rates.

The Government's target of reducing teenage conceptions by 50 per cent. by 2010 is ambitious. I share that ambition. We must consider in particular the way in which we respond locally to the needs of individuals. I hope that the Minister will use this debate as the basis for further discussions on the issue. Behind the statistics are the lives of children in their teens whose children risk having children in their teens. It is crucial that we tackle the issue coherently to ensure that the vicious cycle is broken once and for all, and that people from all backgrounds are enabled to achieve their potential.

11.15 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Stephen Twigg): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) for having raised this important issue. I shall do my best to explain the Government's response to the challenges that he set out.

My hon. Friend asked us to consider new ways of tackling a massive issue that has many implications in terms of health, social exclusion and education. As both he and my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis) have said, it is vital that in doing so we learn from examples of good practice in this country and elsewhere. I agree that it is a key issue in respect of social inclusion: a great deal of the problem is associated with what my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton described as the cycle of poverty. There are varied and complex reasons for the continued high rates of teenage conception. One is the limited aspirations of young people living in areas of high unemployment and deprivation, and another is ignorance. Education would certainly make a difference. A third, the nature of the message, was raised by the young people working on *Exposure* magazine, to which my hon. Friend referred. I shall return to that in a moment.

The Government's teenage pregnancy strategy was launched by the Prime Minister in 1999. It was the first ever attempt by Government to consider the issue on a cross-Government basis, to deal with the causes and to examine some solutions. As my hon. Friend said, we have had some success. Our latest data, from 2001, which he outlined, showed an encouraging 10 per cent. reduction in the under-18 conception rate since 1998 and a larger fall, of 11 per cent., in the under-16 rate. That is very welcome. It represents a fall from 47 per 1,000 in 1998 to 42 per 1,000 in 2001. However, it still a horrifying statistic: 42 in every 1,000 15 to 17-year-old girls become pregnant. That is the continuing challenge before us.

The fall has occurred in four out of five areas of the country. Enfield, as my hon. Friend said, is one of the exceptions. In that area, the under-18 conception rate has increased. The reasons should be examined carefully. The strategy on the ground is strong and has been widely praised. He described some of its features, not least the emphasis that Enfield has placed on the particular needs of asylum seekers and the partnership between agencies, including those concerned with health and housing. The Enfield example reminds us of the scale of the challenge.

I am interested in exploring whether the areas in which there has been no decline in recent years have any characteristics in common. There does not seem to be a single explanation. The Government are working with public health observatories in the Government office regions to try to identify factors that might explain the trends to get a clearer picture. We cannot be complacent.

There has been good progress in the past three years, but there is more to be done. Our commitment is reflected in the inclusion of the reduction target as a Government public service agreement target. It is also a PSA target for local government and one of the two cross-cutting indicators in the local government best value performance indicator set. We also recognise that prevention is critical, and some prevention targets are shared with Connexions. Its role in that regard is critical, and the Government have invested £98 million to support implementation of the strategy, by funding local work and the work led by the teenage pregnancy unit, including the national campaign.

My hon. Friend referred to the important work of the independent advisory group on teenage pregnancy. I pay tribute to the group, particularly in the light of the recent publication of its second annual report and its recommendations to the Government. We are considering those recommendations carefully, and will provide a response later in the year.

It is vital that we have effective, joined-up action, and that all the agencies work together. That requires effective work locally and nationally. We have recently

seen a significant change in responsibility, with the strategy moving from the Department of Health to the Department for Education and Skills. That move was part of a wider change, and work in that area will be led by my hon. Friend the Minister for Children, with assistance from me and the Department for Education and Skills.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton spoke of the excellent work being done in Haringey and Enfield by *Exposure* magazine. He made a number of powerful points about the need to get the message across in a language, and a tone and style, that are relevant to and can be understood by young people. We have also been running an advertising campaign through teenage magazines and local radio. Through that campaign, we seek to target 13 to 17-year-olds—both boys and girls—using a mixture of media to reach them.

We are advertising in teenage magazines and on local independent radio stations, with the aim of dispelling myths, raising awareness and giving accurate information. We want to use an approach that gets through, so humour is useful and the style is non-authoritarian. We have been assessing and evaluating how successful it has been.

The campaign has achieved high recognition: for example, more than 70 per cent. of young people know of it, which compares well with television advertising, which we have not been able to undertake. The campaign has a free helpline that provides advice and gives details of local services. That has helped a significant number of young people, half of them boys, who phoned as a result of the campaign. Our survey of callers showed a high level of satisfaction.

We are now looking into working with brand names and others associated with young people. We recently received the endorsement of a new girl band called Tommi, who played at a young people's sexual health conference last week. They are keen to support us by taking the message out to thousands of young people as they tour the country.

My hon. Friend raised the important issue of how we can get the message to all parts of the community, but we must recognise that in boroughs such as Enfield there are particular issues for some black and ethnic minority communities. We also have to deal with those from other parts of the world, such as asylum seekers, some of whose pregnancies are a direct consequence of rape and torture. We need to do more to help such people, and I shall ask for further research to be undertaken, as my hon. Friend requested.

We have much to learn from local examples, and some work done by Enfield and Haringey councils with their asylum-seeking communities could contribute to the development of our national thinking. I undertake to consider that, and come back to my hon. Friend with more information.

My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green raised the important example of the Netherlands. If we are to be really effective in our work, we need to engage with parents and the wider family. We need to consider how better to support parents in talking to their children about sex, relationships and the possible consequences. The research that I have seen shows that young people want their parents to be the main source of advice, but that talking about such things causes incredible embarrassment in the family. We are working with Parentline Plus on a "time to talk" campaign to promote better communication in the parents' media, using outlets such as *Best*, *Bella* and relevant magazine agony aunts. We are looking at a range of ways in which parents can be engaged more.

My direct responsibility is to do with improving sex and relationship education in schools, which is critical. We have done have a lot of work and listened to young people about how they think sex is talked about in schools, and we clearly have a lot of progress to make on that. What is done is still regarded as too little, too late, with still too much focus on the biology and not enough on relationships. Not enough teachers have the confidence to deliver really effective sex and relationships education.

The Department for Education and Skills issued guidance in 2000 that set out the programme needed to address issues of information and knowledge for boys and girls in schools. Ofsted has reported good progress in schools in implementing the guidance, but has pointed out that a great deal more still needs to be done. I shall work closely with Ofsted to ensure that the reporting arrangements for personal, social and health education are as effective as possible, so that we can monitor progress. In part, there is a need for more specialist teachers who have greater confidence and a wider knowledge base. We are seeking to encourage such teachers and have launched a national personal, social and health education teaching certification programme, which is aimed at developing specialist teachers. About 750 teachers have voluntarily participated this year. We are also considering a similar programme for community nurses, which is being piloted and will be available nationwide from 2004.

As part of that, we want to raise awareness of sexually transmitted infections and consider how to reach boys. I have seen some good examples of schools in London and elsewhere that have made a special effort to reach boys as part of their sex and relationships education, which have not only had potentially positive results in preventing teenage pregnancies, but supported boys who become teenage fathers. We want to ensure access to advice in all its senses.

We need services that all young people who need them can trust. Since the launch of the strategy, we have seen an improvement in the number of services that are available to young people. There are all sorts of good examples of using leisure centres, one-stop-shops, mobile units and other facilities. My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton will be aware of the Enfield and Haringey 4YP sexual health bus, which is an excellent model of the difference that those practices can make locally.

We must work more broadly with the sexual health and HIV strategy, because our concern about teenage pregnancy goes hand in hand with concern about the high rates of sexually transmitted infections among young people. Our work on teenage pregnancy will continue to be closely co-ordinated with work on sexual health and HIV, so that we can reduce waiting times for advice, screening and treatment, in both community clinics and general practice.

We want to ensure that we provide proper support for young parents, because, as my hon. Friend said, they are obviously more likely to live in poverty, be unemployed

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or be unable to access education, training and child care facilities. That is why in 35 areas with high rates of teenage pregnancy we have developed the sure start plus pilots, which include a personal adviser to help pregnant teenagers to make a decision about continuing with the pregnancy, having the child adopted or having a termination. The evaluation of those pilots will be available in 2004. We also want to tackle social isolation via supported housing.

Progress is being made, but as my hon. Friend said, we still have a great deal more to do. It is important that we engage with young people and learn from local and international examples. If we do that, we can continue the progress made in the first three years of the strategy. It is a reflection of the Government's commitment to bring down the rate of teenage pregnancy that we intend to focus on the issue right through the Government, with my hon. Friend the Minister for Children leading.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

Top-up Fees

2 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): The Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education has been in post for less than a month but, so far as I am aware, this is at least the third occasion on which he has been called on to respond to a debate on top-up fees. He should certainly be on top of his brief by now. Hon. Members may wonder what the point is of another run-through on top-up fees, because we had two major debates on them in the House at the end of June. Will we all say the same things and go away having achieved nothing?

This afternoon, I want to return to the subject in the light of the publication of the Education and Skills Committee's report, which has obviously contributed new perspectives. I am pleased to see the Chairman of the Committee present. I also want to discuss the particular perspectives that my constituents gave me in a consultation exercise that I undertook with them earlier in the year. They gave me insights that have perhaps not always been emphasised enough in our debates on the subject.

By way of background, I should say that in a previous life I was an academic and a university admissions tutor. That has given me one or two perspectives on the process of applying for university, which I shall try to bring into the debate a little later. Therefore, I hope that our debate will not simply be a run-round of what we have already said, but tries to move things on a little.

In my consultation exercise with my constituents on top-up tuition fees, I consulted roughly 1,000 local residents, a group of people who have opted into being consulted by me by e-mail. They are from across the constituency and across the political spectrum. They include first-time voters, pensioners and everything in between, and supporters of all parties and of none. Although politician surveys are quite rightly treated with some scepticism, I maintain that the basis of my remarks is an attempt at rigour and to reflect the representativeness of my constituents.

I occasionally put questions to that group of 1,000 people in as neutral a way as I can. On this occasion, I asked them about the Government's policy on top-up fees and referred them to the Department for Education and Skills website for the case in favour and to campaigning websites for the arguments against. I invited my constituents to register a vote for or against top-up fees and, if they wished, to give me reasons for their position. When I have undertaken similar consultations in the past, the division of views has been fairly gentle on many issues. For example, when I asked about building new nuclear power stations, the group divided 2:1 against. On genetically modified crop trials, they voted 2:1 against. However, on top-up fees, the view was 4:1 against. Of all the questions that I have asked my constituents, this was the most divisive. *[Interruption.]* From his reaction, perhaps the Minister thinks that that is a relatively high level of support for top-up fees; I do not know. If he wants, I can introduce him to the supporters. However, there was a clear, strong 4:1 vote against.

The significance of the exercise was not the crude aggregate figures, but the insights that the respondents gave. Some teach at university. Many are young, first-

time voters thinking of going to university; others are parents of people coming up to that stage. A whole cross-section of people gave me insights. I want to draw the House's attention to those this afternoon.

Perhaps the strongest single insight that I gained, on an aspect of the debate that I do not think has had enough attention, is the impact of top-up fees on women. Top-up fees are the same for male and female students, but the implications may be quite different. A woman, on average, will expect to earn less. A woman, on average, will expect to spend time out of the labour market for the birth of children and perhaps when children are young. As a result, although she may graduate with the same debt, she will have to pay it back over a much longer period. A young woman considering whether to go to university may be more disinclined to go down that avenue than a male student when she realises that she will be in debt for a very long period.

I quote from a response from a constituent who was in charge of university halls of residence:

"My impression was that the students"—

the current students—

"who were the first generation of their family to be coming to a University were especially worried about the debts they were accumulating."

The theme of debt and its impact on women in particular is one to which I shall return. I must stress that that response was entirely unprompted by me. Nothing in my questionnaire asked specifically about women. My constituent continued:

"Amongst them the women students were particularly anxious because they could not see how they could repay their debts if they should become pregnant . . . and want to look after their child."

That is a particular issue for women.

Another entirely spontaneous response from another female respondent said that

"it is discriminating against women who will either have to work longer before taking a break to have children (not ideal for the health of the woman, child or family) or will have an almighty debt hanging over her until she can return to high-paid work (assuming she can get it)."

I began to discern a thread in the responses and a concern about the position of women. So as to assess the scale of the issue, I asked the House of Commons Library earlier this week to prepare some fresh analysis for me on the effect of tuition fees and debt on women. I tried to ensure that the example on which we based the figures was as typical and realistic as possible. Complex spreadsheets are available to hon. Members. We assumed that someone graduated not with the maximum possible debt, but with the average debt to which the Government refer—some £15,000. We assumed that the debt rose in line with inflation, rather than at the faster rate that the Select Committee might have suggested in its recommendations, and that real earnings grew as they have in the past. We assumed that the woman earned a typical woman's graduate salary and that her salary followed the profile that someone in a graduate career might expect—in other words, the increments, promotions and seniority that went along with the profile.

We also considered the effect of children, assuming that a woman who has two children would typically have the first child in her late 20s and the second in her early 30s. Clearly, those are generalisations, but they are meant to be illustrative of the scale of the problem. The woman may go back to work full-time and continue her career completely uninterrupted, or she might work half-time or job share until her children are in primary school. We considered the impact of those choices.

The interesting point to come out of the analysis is that a woman with a typical debt who does not have children would pay it back in 13 years. We then considered the case of a woman who has children and goes back to work part-time after her children are born, perhaps on a job share. Assuming that something silly does not happen—she does not go to work on a Tesco checkout but simply works half-time in her previous professional job, then goes back to work full-time when the children are at school, which, in itself, might not be straightforward—it would take not 13 years but 20 to pay back the debt.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's example. If the universities were funded out of general taxation and the woman went back to work part-time with earnings of about £8,000 a year, she would pay back the money, whether through a graduate tax or through the increased general tax that she would have to pay, whereas under the student fees proposal she would pay back the debt only if she earned more than £15,000 a year. If she earned less than £15,000 a year for the rest of her career, she would never pay back the debt.

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman raises several important issues. She would not pay back the debt while on half salary. I assume that the £15,000 is price indexed, but I do not know what the policy is on that—I am assuming annual price indexation. Even on half salary, a woman graduate will tend very quickly to go above the threshold, because real earnings grow with career progression and so on.

In a sense, the hon. Gentleman makes my point for me. If there is a period in which the woman is not working or is earning so little that she pays nothing back, it merely postpones further repayment of the debt. She would still have to pay back the whole amount plus nominal interest. The point at which student debt no longer overhangs her would simply be further postponed.

The instance that I have given of a debt being paid over 20 years is based on fairly cautious assumptions. Therefore, the woman will have paid that off by the time she is 41. In my example, she has two children. I do not imagine that she will still want to live with her mum and dad if she is a female graduate who is aged 40 and has two children. It is reasonable to assume that she will want a mortgage, perhaps at 30, which is about the time that she might want to start a family. For 10 years, she will effectively be servicing two mortgages—the mortgage on the house and the mortgage that is the student loan debt, which starts at £15,000, grows a bit and tails off as her salary increases. Some women—I will quote examples later—will think twice about whether they want decades of debt, as it will have a differential effect on them compared with men.

There are two distinct issues with general taxation. With general taxation—that is, the whole tax pot—there is no named debt. If there is no name on the debt, people

[Mr. Webb]

will not delay having kids until they have paid off their debt, feel that they owe thousands on the house, or know that they must clear thousands on their student loan. The effect is different if they know that they must pay back fees through higher taxes when they graduate. That of course depends on the part of the taxation system used, if at all. For example, a female graduate on a part salary obviously would not repay fees at the higher rate.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to learn that I substantially agree with his analysis, which is consistent with what we have found out. Does he agree that the long and the short of it is that the student debt of a male graduate under normal circumstances will persist for at least one third of his working life, and, for a woman, it will persist for approximately half her working life? Those are substantial overhangs on anybody's career.

Mr. Webb: Certainly, the figures that I have just given for a 20-year repayment for a woman with children assume a pension age of 60, which means that the repayment would cover almost exactly half her working life. As a university academic and an admissions tutor, I found that the mature students entering in their mid-30s were some of the best and most committed that we had – we most wanted such students to enter higher education. If they take, on average, 20 years to repay their debt—and, if they enter the labour market in their late 30s, they may not have the career progression of a 21-year-old female graduate—they could, quite credibly, be repaying their debt while drawing their pension. That does not seem to be the world that we want to move towards, because I assume that debts will not stop at pension age. In a world in which recently retired women pensioners are still trying to repay their student debt, they will have probably tried to pay off their mortgage, and we apparently want to encourage them to save for a pension as well. I do not see how we can square all those circles.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am sure that I do not need to draw to my hon. Friend's attention—although I may need to for other hon. Members—the current Liberal Democrat policy, which is to impose a charge on those earning more than £100,000 a year by raising their income tax. Does he agree that—the unfairness of life being what it is—not many women are earning that sum, and the proposal would therefore be of particular value to them, not only in removing the charge at the level that he discussed, but in imposing a greater charge on those men earning the highest salaries?

Mr. Webb: As ever, my hon. Friend is perceptive. He makes the point that if one uses funding that is not a named debt against a named person, the impact is bound to be different. Very little of the debate has focused on the differential impact of top-up fees on women. I will pursue that point by considering some other responses on top-up fees in my constituency survey, all of which are from female respondents. One woman, who is subject to the current system, said:

"I face the prospect of finishing the repayment of my student loan just in time to retire."

Even with fees of £1,100—not £3,000 or £5,000 as has been suggested—people are repaying those debts in some cases throughout the whole of their lives. I wonder about the world we want to create if those debts are overhanging people.

Another woman said:

"I came from a background with working class parents who didn't believe in spending money you didn't have."

Such young women will be discouraged from applying for university by the prospect of a £15,000 debt. That is the average figure, but it could be £21,000 or even more if there are credit card debts and so on. People look at those figures and are horrified.

I have two children at primary school, so I have time to save. However, if I do not want them to be blighted with a lifetime of debt, the available strategies are to find £30,000 to see them through university without debt or for them to find jobs when they are at university. When I was a university academic, I was aware of the detrimental effect that having a job had on a student's studies. If we force students to work more and more hours to avoid debt on graduation, they will have hardly any time to spare for their studies. Surely it is wrong, when an increasing proportion of students are desperate and worried about the debt that they will end up with, that they spend so much time working that their studies suffer. Society, and the economy, suffer as a result.

Another female respondent, Nicola, said:

"The thought of being £15K in debt would have put me off from going to university."

That is a first-hand observation. Another constituent said:

"I am looking forward to going to university later this year, and if the payment does rise, I will not be able to afford to go. I do not want a huge bank loan over my head when I leave uni, it will be bad enough as it already stands."

Another person, who has children of university age, said:

"I know many young people are now thinking twice about going to University because of the debts that they will incur."

Debt is a central theme to the debate on top-up fees. It has an impact in two ways. First, the anticipation of debt discourages people from applying. Secondly, there is evidence that it is the principal reason for drop-out among people who have overcome the first hurdle and then find that they cannot service their mounting debts. The Government's policy will surely make matters worse.

A second problem is obvious when it is pointed out. However, I had not grasped it hitherto, but the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) intimated it in his intervention. The system is progressive because the low-paid do not pay much back and the well-paid pay a lot back. That applies in any year but, over a lifetime, everyone repays the same amount for the fees that are not rebated for low-income families. Lower-paid graduates, such as women, repay a fairly small amount if they earn only just above the threshold, but they spend more of their life repaying the debt. They do not have less to repay; they merely repay it over a longer time.

James Purnell: Surely anyone who is earning less than £15,000 a year would not repay any of the loan. The loan

is only a small part of the total cost because 95 per cent. is financed by the state. The people who pay higher taxes will repay a greater proportion of the cost of going to university.

Mr. Webb: In a fair system, the better-off should pay a larger proportion of the total cost of a university education. With fees of £3,000, £1,900 is not rebated even for low-income households. I hope that the Minister will update us on the Secretary of State's thinking on that because he seemed to intimate in evidence to the Select Committee that he was considering whether the whole £3,000 should be rebated for low-income households. Perhaps the Minister will tell us how he views that suggestion. Even the £1,900 is a flat rate. Whether people are rich or poor, they face a debt of £1,900 a year for tuition fees. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde is right to say that if people spend their lives earning less than £15,000 a year, indexed to prices, they will never pay it back. However, typical graduate salaries are well in excess of that when allowance is made for real earnings growth compared with the prices index threshold and the career progression that many graduates will enjoy. Most graduates will pay the money back, but those at the bottom end—those nearer the £15,000 threshold—will pay it back over a longer period. They will not pay less. With progressive taxation, people on lower incomes pay less. That is the fairness difference that I want to draw to the attention of hon. Members.

A range of other issues linked to top-up fees came up in responses from my constituents. One argument for top-up fees is that they enable the Government to achieve their 50 per cent. target for students entering higher education. My constituents stressed the importance of not forcing people into inappropriate courses. They were sceptical whether 50 per cent. of people are fitted for three-year honours degrees at traditional universities, although I know that the Government are not driving towards that. My constituents strongly support the money raised by the top-up fees being used to facilitate vocational training and courses that include academic content and on which people learn trades. The Government should not try to increase the numbers just for the sake of it. I am glad that I am not a graduate in media studies because, judging from their responses, my constituents would not think well of me if I were. They are not great fans of that course.

The Select Committee's insights into differential top-up fees are interesting. What would happen if some institutions charged top-up fees and others did not? How would that affect people? One of my constituents said that

"top up fees will create a two tier University system and this is likely to mean that middle class students will go to the prestigious high fee Universities and others will go to the 'teaching factories'".

That comment is obviously linked with the Government's agenda to separate teaching and research.

If the Select Committee is right and practically every institution charges £3,000, there will not be a differential effect but an aggregate effect, which I discussed in relation to debt. There will not be a differential effect because a market will not be created. I understand the logic of the Select Committee's position—if fees of up to £5,000 are allowed, it may create differentiation and if the Government want a market that is how to do it—but given my remarks about aggregate debt and notwithstanding some suggestions about grants, I would have great difficulty in supporting a threshold of £5,000 for tuition fees.

Mr. Rendel: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way on the interesting point about the creation of a market, which the Minister, in his last speech in the House, suggested that he wanted to achieve. Those universities that consider themselves to be less prestigious tell me that even if tuition fees go up to £5,000, they must still charge the maximum. The point about marketing is that if a university markets itself as having a lower fee—that may be attractive because students will not have to pay so much—that immediately makes it less prestigious.

Mr. Webb: My hon. Friend is right. In the luxury car market, if Rolls-Royce were to charge less for its cars, it might well sell fewer because they would not be seen as an elite product. I do not know how far that analogy works, but there is danger that if a university signals that it does not think that the market will bear the full fee, it is signalling that its course is not popular or that the people who take it will not tell their friends to do so. Prices have a signalling effect, which is a concern.

The flip-side of the top-up fees policy is the access regulator. Only institutions that satisfy the access regulator will be allowed to charge top-up fees. Even my constituents who liked top-up fees did not like the access regulator. Most of their replies are printable, although they are not polite. They referred to "a lousy idea"; "an army of bureaucrats"; and "needless bureaucracy". One mentioned:

"The elimination of this ghastly 'Access Regulator', a function that only a politician of the worst sort could have dreamt up."

The Minister was not in the Department at the time, so it was not him. Another reply said:

"The access regulator is another half-witted way of wasting the taxpayer's hard-earned money".

My constituents are deeply hostile to the creation of an additional quango.

One of my constituents made a more constructive comment:

"I also worry about the access regulator because it may come down to meeting quotas of people, who are not the most suitable for the course but fit the statistics".

That is the danger posed by such intervention.

I shall make a couple more observations. To return to the intervention by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde, we are aware that graduates, by dint of being graduates, will, on average, tend to earn more than others. There is clearly an issue for those who go into public service and the voluntary sector, and who do not earn a great amount. They will be in debt for a long period. On average, however, graduates tend to attract a premium, will pay more in tax and will therefore contribute more to the cost of their fees. The Government say that those of us who do not support tuition fees think that graduates should pay nothing, but that is not remotely the case because they will pay extra tax by dint of their being graduates.

[Mr. Webb]

There are issues about how the top-up fees will affect people on longer courses such as architects, medics and so forth. The Government are so keen to get graduates into certain key occupations that they will subsidise their fees, but that is not true across the board. The policy will have a different impact in that case.

I am very concerned about the position of mature students. I am not aware of preferential rates being charged to them—I am happy to be corrected about that—but if they are charged the full fees, they really will face a lifetime of debt until retirement. Surely we want to encourage such people to go back into higher education.

My premise is not that higher education does not need additional funding. If we are to compete internationally as a nation we will not do so by paying sweatshop wages. The country in which we want to live would compete not on sweatshop wages but on a value-added basis, and with a highly educated, highly skilled and highly trained work force. That has to be the right strategy—we do not query that. An expansion of higher education—albeit of a more diverse form than we have traditionally seen—is to be welcomed.

It is not cheap keeping our universities at the forefront of research, and I have received representations from my constituents who are concerned about the low salaries for academic, research and support staff in universities. All those things have a price tag attached. My contention is that the top-up fee route of paying for them has very grave consequences that make it unacceptable.

The debt issue is critical, and debt for women is a particular problem. If we are not to expect parents to find tens of thousands of pounds to prevent their offspring from getting into debt, if we are not to expect students to spend their entire university careers working full-time to prevent themselves from getting into debt and if we are not to prevent women—and young people in general—from going to university because of the fear of debt on graduation, the top-up fee policy must be reconsidered. I hope that the Minister will respond specifically on the position of women, and more generally on the effect of debt on the scale envisaged among the people about whom I am concerned.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. I remind the Chamber that it is customary in these 90-minute Adjournment debates to commence the first of the three winding-up speeches 30 minutes before termination. I am giving fair warning that we have only 33 minutes of general discussion left. I ask hon. Members to bear that in mind when making their contributions, and when accepting and responding to interventions.

2.27 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) for allowing me to speak. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wrote to him and to you. I want to be brief because I realise that many people want to speak in this important debate. The Select Committee on Education and Skills, which I chair, was in the final stages of agreeing its report when the two Opposition days—one for the Liberal Democrats and the other for the official Opposition—took place. I took a vow of abstinence in those debates, so it is a pleasure to have five minutes today.

I would like to put a rather different case to the Chamber. The Select Committee listened to many experts when taking oral evidence. We received evidence from around the country in Belfast, Edinburgh, Oxford and Cambridge. We met the Russell group, and talked to many people, including parents and others. What the report came down to—it is good when one gets to this stage—was the fact that the unique nature of British higher education is quality.

Our universities have a reputation for such high quality that people from around the world still want to come here. They do not want to go to many American universities. They want to go to those in the Ivy League, but there are many universities in the United States that do not attract overseas students. Overseas students are not attracted to the universities of our fellow members of the European Union because they long ago gave up quality and went for quantity, with large classes, little tutorial intervention and poor pastoral care.

Anyone who can do so likes to come to Britain to study in higher education. What is our unique selling point? It is quality and the combination of teaching and research under one roof. In any one institution, research and teaching are carried out by the same people. That does not mean that they do that all the time and that some researchers are not less available than others. However, the principle exists, it is right and it underpins the very nature of our university system. That is the unique selling point of our higher education system.

The problem with preserving that system, however, is that it is expensive, and it will get more expensive as we go on. As the Select Committee report said, it is vital to have a vibrant, expanding and high-quality higher education system to encourage the development of individuals' potential. Most of us came into politics because we believed that the potential of all the people born in our country should be expressed and developed, and that is good for society at large. I still believe that a good society is a well-educated and trained society.

We must be frank and admit that the economic challenges to our country mean that we will increasingly have to invest in innovative products and services and in a range of industries and sectors, some of which have not yet been dreamt of. Such developments will come out of university research, participatory research and partnership research. The challenge facing our country is to stay wealthy and to continue providing good, well-paid employment for the individuals who live in it. That will depend on the higher education sector. I speak to many politicians who still do not understand the fact that the largest employer and wealth creator in many constituencies is probably the university.

By far and away the largest employer in my constituency of Huddersfield is the university, not manufacturing, the big chemical or dyestuffs companies, the wool textile industry or engineering, although they are still around. The real employment of the future is in the university. We can look at Manchester, Birmingham and London in the same way.

Let us take the 43 university institutions out of London and see what damage could be done to this great metropolis of ours. Taking the university institutions out of Edinburgh, Cardiff, or Swansea would have the same effect. The universities are so important to our future that we need to spend an increasing amount of the national treasure on developing them. There is the rub. We are taking part in a debate that I think is too centred on the issue of top-up fees.

I want briefly to take us back to the Dearing proposals. Dearing said clearly that we should fund universities on the basis that those who benefit from university education and the university sector itself should pay for it. That includes society, through taxation, because, as I have explained, society benefits from higher education. Individuals, who will have a better life, higher-paid employment and more opportunities, should pay towards their higher education.

The White Paper is weak on the issue of employers, and I hope that the Minister will carefully consider our proposals for a levy on employers of more than a certain size. We propose that, if they do not devote a certain percentage of their turnover to research and development, they should be asked to pay into a levy that will flow into universities. The Government should take that, or a similar idea, seriously.

Those of us in this lower House of Parliament know that, at present, between 15 and 20 per cent. of our constituents, or at least the constituents of those present here, will benefit or will have benefited from higher education. About 80 per cent. of people in my constituency receive no benefit from higher education. Many of them leave school at 16. The state will have invested £45,000 in their education between the ages of three and 16, but they will get nothing more. However, those who stay on get a minimum of £25,000 between the ages of 16 and 21.

Mr. Rendel: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sheerman: Reluctantly.

Mr. Rendel: I am grateful. Does not the hon. Gentleman recognise that all those people will go to doctors for medical services, and that their children will have teachers at school? Those teachers and doctors will all have had a higher education, without which they could not do those jobs and give that help.

Mr. Sheerman: I recognise that familiar argument, but we are talking about a £25,000 extra investment in people who stay on for higher education. Some people leave school at 16 or 18, without a university education, and start their own business. Some of our greatest entrepreneurs do not have a higher education. If such people go into a bank and say that they want to start a small factory or an ICT company and therefore need to employ people, the bank manager will not say, "We are going to give you an interest-free loan."

Many people in our country do not benefit from higher education, but they pay tax and, quite fairly, they think that they can look at those who do benefit from higher education and say that Dearing was right. It is important to get the balance right between those who pay contributions and those who receive the benefits.

As we said in our report, the Government have invested enormously in higher education, but it is not enough if we are to have the highest-quality, internationally competitive research throughout the country, not just at a handful of universities in London and the south-east, and if we are to have well-paid university teachers. They have not had a real-terms pay increase for 25 years, which I know because I was a university teacher 25 years ago. There is an increasing shortage of young teachers who go to university and stay there, especially in specialist subjects. It is almost a mystery how we get them to do that on current salaries, and it is almost impossible to get people for certain subjects.

I constantly hear the refrain, "Don't wanna pay," which is almost like a teenage stamping of the feet, or Dario Fo's "Can't Pay? Won't Pay!" As the debate develops over the months and years before the next general election, I hope that the people who say, "We don't want to pay," will advance proposals that recognise the fact that, if they want a high-quality higher education, people have to pay. The Government cannot keep ratcheting up income tax, even for those earning more than £100,000, and I am dubious about how much money that would provide. If the extra money is not going to come from the taxpayer, where else will it come from in a society that believes in equity between people who receive benefits and those who pay for them? I hope that the debate can be a little more sophisticated.

The hon. Member for Northavon made a very good introduction. It is valuable that he has been corresponding with 1,000 of his constituents by e-mail, but they must start to think through what they want for our country in the long term and who should pay for that privilege and investment, so that we can get the balance right over the coming years.

2.38 pm

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): I congratulate the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on securing this debate. He is one of those Members who give the Liberal Democrats a good name, if that is possible. He is extremely serious about social security issues, on which I have had many dealings with him. However, perhaps he knows in his heart of hearts that the picture that he paints of what the Government are doing may not be as multi-dimensional as it might be.

As politicians, either in opposition or in government, we must balance opposition against opportunism, although I am not making that accusation about the hon. Gentleman. The Conservative party has put forward a policy pretending that we should not set the target at 50 per cent., but I think that it knows in its heart of hearts that that is not what the country needs. I have great respect for the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), but he must sometimes find it difficult to defend such things, given his one-nation credentials.

Mr. Boswell: On the assumption that our respect is mutual, may I ask the hon. Gentleman to enlighten us as to the objective basis on which the 50 per cent. target was selected?

James Purnell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for introducing my first question: is the 50 per cent.

[James Purnell]

target arbitrary? In some respects, of course, it is. Why 50 per cent? Why not 51, 49 or 52.356 per cent? The point is that the 50 per cent. target makes clear the direction in which we want the system to head, and those who argue against such a target need to say what direction they want the system to take.

There are already pressures in the system. Improving A-level results mean that more people will want to go to university. Demographic pressures will bring tens of thousands, or perhaps even 100,000, extra students into the system over the next few years. Therefore, the figure is naturally rising towards 50 per cent., even before we take into account the relevant arguments, which are powerful.

The first argument is that more than 60 per cent. of people in the relevant age bracket go to university in countries with economies similar to ours, such as Australia and the Scandinavian countries. Indeed, the figure in most Scandinavian countries is already 70 per cent. Are we saying that the figure in this country will, uniquely, remain stuck at 42 per cent? Are the Conservatives saying that they will bring back a cap, as the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) did when he was Chief Secretary to the Treasury? At that time, people were told, "You may have worked hard at school and sweated to get the right A-level results, but we're not going to let you go to university, even though your results would have got you in five or 10 years ago."

The second argument relates to access. At the moment, about 80 per cent. of children from the professional classes go to university, compared with 15 per cent. from the non-professional, manual classes. What are those who are against the 50 per cent. target saying about people from the manual classes? Are they saying that such people are genetically too stupid to go to university? Are they saying that they are doomed to stay in low-class, low-skill occupations? Are they saying that that is a fair reflection of their skills and talents? Those figures brutally show the discrimination that confronts people in our education system. It is often said that fewer than 1,000 people from social classes D and E get three good A-levels each year. We must address that problem, and I believe that the Government are doing so. However, that will not be enough, and we must make a radical effort to increase access so that more people can go to university.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): Does my hon. Friend think that his argument is strengthened by the fact that we never changed the 80:20 participation ratio even in the heyday of full grants? Even after the grant was introduced, it seemed that there was a 20 per cent. ceiling, and we did not budge it. That shows that individual finances are not the real issue behind access to higher education.

James Purnell: I absolutely agree. The only reason one could give for not heading in the direction of a 50 per cent. target is that one believed in a 30:30 world. In such a world, middle class people would go to university, graduate and get the good jobs. There would then be some administrative jobs in the middle. Finally, there would be the low-paid section at the bottom, where people would be trapped, never having the opportunity to go to university and, therefore, to get a highly paid job. This may not be true of the hon. Member for Daventry, but people who denigrate media studies courses or those of our universities that used to be polytechnics are appealing to a deeply patronising and conservative tendency, which still exists in parts of our society. I think, however, that they may be slightly embarrassed about that in their heart of hearts.

I am speaking in the debate because my constituents in Hyde would benefit hugely from the proposed policy. At the moment, we broadly achieve the national average for GCSE results, but the proportion of those who go to university is only half the national average. The policy will increase that proportion and allow constituents from families that often earn less than £15,000 or £20,000 to go to university. It will do that because it will make education free at the point of use. The policy will get rid of upfront tuition fees, bring back grants for the very poorest and give them more money in their student loan to pay their maintenance costs. It will make students much less dependent on credit card debt, which has much higher interest rates. The policy will start to allow people in my constituency to have the same aspirations to go to university as people in more middle class constituencies, particularly in the south, and that is why I defend it.

Mr. Webb: Does the hon. Gentleman share the view that the distinction between the £1,100 top-up fee, which is fully rebated for the poor, and the £1,900, which is not rebated at all, is a concern for his constituents? Would he like to see that £1,900 rebated for the poor?

James Purnell: As the consultation on the White Paper goes forward, we need to think about grants, where the £15,000 kicks in, and getting the right balance between having the right incentives in the system for people to choose which university to go to and making the way in which money is repaid as progressive as possible.

The 50 per cent. target is a crucial signal of the direction in which the Government are heading. It is arbitrary, but, if anything, too low. It is the right aspiration for 2010, but, given the demographic pressures, the improvement in A-levels and the fact that Scandinavian countries, Canada and Australia are already way above the 50 per cent. level, we should go higher than 50 per cent. in time. Anyone who pretends that we do not need to be heading in that direction is doing the country a disservice.

Increasing participation is the first spending pressure. The second is quality. I do not think that anyone pretends that that is not an issue. As the Chairman of the Select Committee made clear, the pay going to teachers and academics is a scandal that has gone unchecked for too long. We are starting to do something about it, but much more must be done.

It is still far too difficult for people to fund graduate courses. Anyone who fails to get a very good first still finds it extremely difficult to stay on at university and do a graduate course. Again, the Government are doing something about that, but we need more funding to address the issue. The Government have increased research funding in a number of areas, but, as Universities UK has made clear, there is still a lot further to go.

The twin spending pressures cannot be avoided. We must increase the proportion of people going to university and consider the spending pressures in terms of quality because, without world-class universities, in 10 or 20 years' time, we will be suffering in relation not just to the accumulation of knowledge but to the development of our economy. It is widely agreed across the House that universities are one of the key engines of economic growth in the 21st century.

We must ask ourselves how we will pay for that spending. Broadly, there are three alternatives. We can pay through general taxation. I agree with that, and we do that. The vast majority of university education is paid for through universal taxation. Such taxation is progressive and reflects the fact that there are great benefits to society. People use doctors and benefit from those who work in research and from general economic growth. Everyone benefits from our universities.

Is it right, however, to fund the whole of the increase needed to meet the spending pressures through general taxation? Even if we were to follow the Liberal Democrat proposal of increasing taxes on people earning more than £100,000, where would we want to spend that money? Would we want to spend it on people going to university, given that such people will, by and large, benefit from going to university, earn more and have their horizons expanded, or on genuinely universal services, such as sure start, nurseries, child tax credits, child benefit, schools and transport?

Even if we could raise all the money by a tax on people earning more than £100,000, which, along with the Chairman of the Select Committee, I very much doubt, higher education would not be the right place to spend it. It would not be fair. It is fair to ask people such as me who went to university to pay back a proportion of that cost. Everyone in their heart of hearts basically agrees with that.

The second alternative is to have a graduate tax.

Mr. Rendel: The argument about whether the money would be spent on higher education if it were raised is interesting. However the money is raised, if the Government spend it on some other service rather than increasing the amount spent on higher education, and decide to go ahead with top-up fees, I presume that they will then reduce the amount of taxation that is otherwise spent on universities and put it into all those other valuable and noble causes to which the hon. Gentleman referred, thus leaving the universities with no more funding than they had to start with.

James Purnell: That is a straightforwardly mistaken argument. People in universities are arguing for tuition fees precisely because they believe that they will have more control over the money. The money is much more likely to go to areas other than universities if it is taken in general taxation. University funding under the Conservatives saw a decline in per-student funds pretty much throughout the 18 years that they were in government. The hon. Gentleman would find exactly that if he ever became a higher education Minister.

Mr. Rendel: If the hon. Gentleman examines history, he will see that precisely what I just described happened when this Government—his party's Government—introduced tuition fees. Universities received the same money as before because, although they received tuition fee money, taxation money was reduced in line with it.

James Purnell: Again, that is straightforwardly wrong. We are increasing the money going to higher education by, I believe, 9 per cent. in real terms. It is, in fact, increasing for the first time in 25 years.

Mr. Boswell: I align myself with the comment made by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). The then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, now the Secretary of State for the Home Department, promised that the money raised by the initial tuition fees, which, incidentally, were against Labour pledges, was additional money made available to the universities and was directed towards solving their financial problems, so why did the unit of funding not increase for six years, and why are they now in as bad a financial position, if not worse, than they were in 1997?

James Purnell: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that the unit of funding is now increasing. It did not increase in the first term because participation was rising and money was going into research funding. It is incontrovertible that the amount of money going into universities is increasing in real terms, and people in the university sector want the money raised in that way rather than through general taxation because they believe that they are more likely to see it than if there are arguments over the split between universities, health, primary schools and the NHS. They know that, under this Government, unlike under the Conservative Government, they can be confident about receiving general increases in money. However, they know that that will not be enough, so they believe that some tuition fee system will be the best way of ensuring that that money will be additional.

Could we raise the money through a graduate tax? Again, we could. I am completely agnostic about whether we should have a graduate tax or a tuition fee system. The greatest problem with a graduate tax is that it would have to be levied on everyone by adding it to the basic rate of tax. People would therefore pay it from an income of some £6,500 to £7,000—the hon. Member for Northavon is an expert on these issues, and he may correct me if I am wrong—which is about half the level at which the tax is currently paid. It is clearly much more regressive compared with the Government's proposal. The fairer way of raising money, other than through the basic rate of tax, is through repayments, which are income contingent but kick in at a higher level. If the graduate tax were added to the top rate of tax, the increase would not be 2p or 3p in the pound on the top rate of tax for people who had gone to university, but presumably 6p, 7p, 8p, 9p or 10p. If the idea of an income-contingent debt is a disincentive to going to university, the idea of paying 5p or more extra for going to university as part of the graduate tax if one is a top-rate taxpayer would be a clear disincentive.

An income-contingent loan is a fair way of raising money. If people could persuade me that it was fair to raise it through a graduate tax, I would be open to it, but the facts do not support that. People have advanced this great idea that debt will hang over people for the rest of their lives, but it should be made clear to them that the

[James Purnell]

debt is income contingent. The hon. Member for Northavon talked about the possibility of Rolls-Royce reducing its prices. If loans used for selling cars were income contingent, and people knew that they would not have to pay the money back if they earned less than £15,000 a year, an awful lot of people earning less than that would be popping down to Rolls-Royce and buying Silver Shadows.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned women. I greatly admire the way in which he consults his constituents, and I may steal the idea—plagiarism being the sincerest form of flattery. The biggest issues that face women in my constituency are the lack of universal child care and nursery education. If extra money were made available from general taxation, that is where I would invest it.

I recently met people from Hyde Clarendon, and university students have raised the issue with me. They are extremely intelligent and perceptive people, and they understand the details. If it were explained to students that the debt is income contingent and the small proportion of the total cost involved were made clear, we would be able to move forward with a policy that, in my view, is clearly in the national interest. It will be fair in terms of access, and it will plug the quality gap emerging in our universities.

2.55 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on bringing this subject to our attention. As he said, it is the third time in the past few weeks that we have had the chance to debate it. For my party, however, the more often we can do so the better. I am delighted to have the chance to put our views to the House and to the public. I am delighted also to have the chance to talk about the policies of the Government and the Conservative party; it is easy to spot holes in the policies of both.

The Chairman of the Select Committee said that he believed that most people did not benefit from higher education. That is an extraordinary thing to say.

Mr. Sheerman: Directly.

Mr. Rendel: The hon. Gentleman has clarified what he meant.

The example of David Beckham has been introduced before when talking about the money earned by people who have not had a higher education. His earnings are partly due to the fact that he played as England's captain in the last World cup. However, he was able to play only because someone had mended his metatarsal bone a few weeks earlier. To some extent, his earnings are now dependent on the fact that somebody was around who could do that.

The fact is that everyone who earns that sort of money will, in one way or another, be dependent on those who have had a higher education. Such an education can give people the chance to work for entrepreneurs who have not had a higher education, to provide services for their firms or in one way or another to add to the wealth of the nation and therefore the wealth of those entrepreneurs that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

The logic of the hon. Gentleman's position—that one should pay for whatever part of one's education others do not have—inevitably means that everyone should pay for education beyond the compulsory age of 16. If people have to pay for their higher education simply because not everyone gets it, they should pay also for education between the ages of 16 and 18. So far as I know, that has not yet become Labour party policy. I would be interested in whether the Minister has anything to say about that. Perhaps he will surprise us all by changing policy on post-compulsory education.

Mr. Sheerman: I know that the hon. Gentleman had a rather exclusive education, and that he is therefore a little removed from the world, but I was saying that individuals should make a contribution. I did not say that people should pay in full for their post-16 or post-18 education. I called for them to make a contribution for their higher education.

Mr. Rendel: It is interesting that those who have had post-compulsory education but not higher education will not have to pay under the hon. Gentleman's theory, but that those who have higher education will. I do not see the logic of that argument. Those who have education post-compulsory school age should either pay for it all or make a contribution to it all, or make no contribution to either. The idea that people should have to make a contribution for higher education but not for post-compulsory education has no logic.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northavon made a powerful case, and he spoke of the representations that he has received from his constituents. In particular, he is right about the special effect that top-up fees will have on women. He seems to think that no one has been talking about it, but I assure him that when I go to universities and talk to groups of lecturers and students, I invariably make the point that the policy will have a major differential effect on women. He will not be surprised to hear that the response to such remarks is immediate, especially from the women. All heartily agree that the policy is particularly unfair to them.

There is an overwhelming view among students, young people, parents and university teachers that top-up fees and tuition fees have no part to play, because they are no answer to the problems that face the higher education system. However, in relation to my hon. Friend's speech, I should say that the Government are right about the need to widen participation, especially among those from the traditionally under-represented groups. The White Paper admits that the social class gap among those entering higher education is unacceptably wide and has widened. That analysis is confirmed by the MORI/Unite student living report produced earlier this year, which states that the proportion of students from social classes C2, D and E has dropped in the past three years from 20 to 17 per cent. Under Labour, the ratio of ABC1 students to C2DE students has increased from four to one to five to one.

Top-up fees, which would cause debts to soar to more than £20,000 on graduation, would make the situation much worse. We cannot have both a serious policy of widening participation to include students from non-traditional backgrounds and charges for tuition that place serious financial and psychological obstacles in the

path of participation. The two policies are mutually exclusive, and the proposals in the White Paper, far from removing the contradiction, merely reinforce it.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: I wish to ask the hon. Gentleman two things. First, does he agree with the direction of travel towards a target of 50 per cent. of people accessing higher education, and secondly, given the thesis that he is advancing, why does he think that when there was no charge for higher education and full grants were available, only 20 per cent. from the lower socio-economic classes went into higher education?

Mr. Rendel: I am sure that there are many reasons why the participation rate was not higher, not least the failures of our education system further down the tree. It is a question of how many people progress to the right level in schools. The fact is that tuition fees have made the situation worse and top-up fees are likely to make it even worse. To answer the hon. Lady's question about the target, we should be aiming to make it possible for all young people who have the ability to make good use of a university education to have the opportunity to do so. The question should be not whether we can set a rigid target of 50 per cent. or any other figure, but how many people we can enable to reach a stage at which their education and their ability are such that they can make good use of a university education.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: I asked whether the hon. Gentleman was in favour of the direction of travel in increasing participation towards the examples that my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) gave from Scandinavia, Australia and Canada.

Mr. Rendel: I am sorry if I did not make myself clear. I thought that I had said that one of the few points on which I agree with the Government is the need to increase the rate of participation. The direction is right, but the Government are going about getting there in an odd way.

I want to concentrate on two areas in which top-up fees might have an impact. The first is university funding, which I mentioned a few moments ago. It seems that all parties now agree that universities need more money—they have been seriously underfunded. The last Conservative Administration presided over a 40 per cent. real-terms drop in funding per student, and during Labour's first term in office there was a further cut of 7 per cent. in funding per student from the taxpayer. Britain now spends less as a proportion of gross domestic product on higher education than it did in 1989, when there were half as many students as there are now. That is a telling statistic.

The introduction of tuition fees did not result in any extra money for higher education. That was confirmed by Professor Sir Howard Newby, chief executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England, who told a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee on 28 January 2002, at which I was present:

> "The grant to institutions was reduced by exactly the amount that was coming through in tuition fees, so essentially there has been a displacement effect."

James Purnell: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that higher education funding is now growing at 9 per cent. a year in real terms?

Mr. Rendel: I certainly pay tribute to the fact that the Government have in the past year or two begun to increase the amount of money going into higher education in real terms. That is good and has had welcome effects, but it has taken an awfully long time. Moreover, owing to the reductions in past, the level is still not back where it was when the Government took office, let alone the position that held when the Conservative Government came to office in 1979, since when there has been a 40 per cent. drop in funding per student in real terms.

Why should the outcome for top-up fees be any different? There really is no logical reason to suppose that it will be. All that will happen if top-up fees are introduced is that the balance between the public and the private parts of the funds that go to universities will change. There is no reason to suppose that the overall amount will be any different from what it otherwise would have been if all the funding came from the public sector and general taxation.

The Government have denied that: the Minister told us recently that the income from top-up fees

> "will be additional money going into universities."—[*Official Report*, 23 June 2003; Vol. 407, c. 766.]

However, he has so far not been able to explain what provisions the legislation will include to ensure that, so I hope that he will do so today. Perhaps that is not surprising, since I cannot see any provisions that could possibly do so. If there were such provisions, they would in any case not be consistent with sound financial management, since surely Government must first decide how to split up the cake of our national wealth and then decide where the money for education is to come from.

To decide first how to get the money and then to leave to chance how much for higher education the universities decide to raise from our national wealth would a mad way of proceeding, and I do not believe that even this Government are capable of that. The important point about the impact of top-up fees on university funding, therefore, is that they will have no effect on the total funding.

I should like to concentrate on the effect that top-up fees could have on the credibility of the Conservative party. The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) is an honest chap, and if it were not for the special parliamentary meaning of the term, I would perhaps dare to call him a friend. However, on tuition fees he seems to have difficulties with his own hon. Friends. The new Conservative policy to scrap tuition fees has been much trumpeted; however, the message does not yet seem to have got across to the Conservative members of the Select Committee, not one of whom backed my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) when he produced a minority report last week to outline his opposition to tuition and top-up fees.

[Mr. Rendel]

Although I hardly dare to think that I could be so honoured, perhaps hon. Members noticed my speech when there was an opportunity to debate the Conservative proposals on 25 June. On that occasion I referred to research by Professor Nicholas Barr of the London school of economics that shows that the Conservative proposals would not only end the proposed expansion, but cut participation from the current rate of 43 per cent. to as low as 36 per cent. by 2010. Since then, Libby Ashton of the Higher Education Policy Institute has shown that up to 250,000 young people who would otherwise be well qualified to take up a university place would be denied one under the Tory proposals. Moreover, those people would be disproportionately drawn from the least well-off families. The Institute for Fiscal Studies found:

"The Conservative proposals would benefit the richest households more than the Government proposals while the poorest households would be worse off."

It is therefore no wonder that Professor Barr concludes:

"The Tory proposals are ... offensive to anyone who cares about fairness."

Mr. Sheerman: What did Professor Barr say about the Liberal Democrats' proposals? The hon. Gentleman will find his comments in the same document.

Mr. Rendel: Professor Barr has certainly never been in favour of funding higher education out of general taxation, for reasons over which I have had many arguments with him; however, I am referring to what he said about the Conservative proposals. I do not pretend that we are fully in line with each other and never have done—we have argued long and hard about the issue.

The Liberal Democrats, it has to be said, and this is really the difference—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must bring it to the attention of the hon. Gentleman that he has made many interventions already in the debate. I do not wish to inhibit the flow of the debate, but he is rapidly approaching 15 minutes in making his own contribution, in addition to the numerous interventions that he has already made. I therefore ask him to bring his comments to a close fairly quickly.

Mr. Rendel: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall certainly try to do that.

The main difference between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives with regard to abolishing tuition fees and top-up fees is that the Liberal Democrats oppose fees, because we believe that they are an obstacle to wider participation, whereas the Tories want to scrap fees at the cost of participation.

The Government have earned some respect for their commitment to a fairer higher education system, in which more people have an opportunity to take part and from which more people will benefit. I hope that they will take account of the arguments advanced by many on the front line in our universities, in Parliament and on the Government Benches to show that the noble objective of increasing participation can be achieved only if they reverse their policy on tuition and top-up fees.

3.10 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I congratulate the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on initiating the debate and also on the measured terms in which he put his case. That set the tone. This will not be the last debate on the subject, and I hope that any subsequent debates will be conducted with the same understanding of the complexity of the issues.

I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said, and I am sure that his remarks will repay further study—I welcomed his technique of going out and asking his electorate for views on the matter. I also noted two particular points. He is right to emphasise the differential impact on the position of women. I would say that, because I have three graduate daughters and am sensitive to the issue. I was also interested in the nuancing of what he said about the vocational experience arising from higher education. We all understand that point.

I listened to the views of the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) and have debated with him previously on a rather wider compass than we have today. We have differences of view and opinions as to solutions, but I note his conversion to looking towards people's career development. That will be a welcome additional theme.

I do not want to overlook the contribution made by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman). He has presided over a useful Select Committee report, which will repay not merely partial quotation this afternoon, but deeper study over the recess. I intend to go through it carefully then. The report has properly brought together a number of issues.

I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) for his contribution. From time to time, he makes an excellent job of defending the indefensible aspects of Government policies: someone has to do it, and I cannot think of anyone who could do it much better.

I am disappointed that the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons) has absented herself after making several interesting interventions, not least because we have "form" on the matter when I was the Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and she was the president of the National Union of Students. I will not say that our positions have been reversed, but I would have enjoyed probing her on her current stance on these matters.

I am conscious of the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but none the less will remind hon. Members, before the record is distorted, that the Conservative party—I include myself in this because I was in the Conservative Government of that time—comes to this debate with clean hands. I shall take up the point made by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde on the issue of participation as opposed to access, about which there is systemic confusion.

James Purnell: If the hon. Gentleman's party were to come to power and cut 250,000 students from the total roll, does he not think that both participation and access would decrease?

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Gentleman has leapt to a conclusion with which I do not necessarily agree. Our

proposals would make it possible to provide an adequate offer—with the option of progression to higher education—for anyone qualified to do it.

I wanted to put it on the record that a Conservative Government took us from an elite to a mass system of higher education, with participation of young people rising from 8 to 33 per cent. or more. That is a major and historic achievement, which we have no wish to reverse. We did that without imposing tuition fees. The student loans that we introduced and that enabled us to fulfil that policy at considerable speed in the early 1990s were of a magnitude lower than the loan requirements implied by the present Government's policies.

Finally, it is often overlooked that, although there were difficulties with the structure of mortgage-type loans, they did not kick in until 85 per cent. of average earnings was attained. On that basis, a starting figure for the repayment of loans would be a salary of more than £20,000, which is more or less in line with the Select Committee's thinking.

Even in this short compass I would wish to concede that two issues are of continuing concern. First, we all believe that there has been too little participation from the lower three socio-economic classes. In some respects, it has gone back from my days in university. Hon. Members may be interested to know that the first piece of work that I commissioned from officials when I became Minister was an analysis of the situation as it then applied. The lack of participation of those groups is a great loss to universities, which miss able students, and to those individuals who do not take part.The answer, in our view, is to concentrate on the schools. We should get people prepared for university and ensure that they have adequate prior attainments, as that has a big influence on drop-out rates, rather than carry out social engineering at the university level.

Secondly, there is undoubtedly pressure on university funding. In exchanges with the hon. Member for Newbury, we noted the fact that, despite tuition fees, things have not improved and the money, as the Treasury would say, has been taken into account in the overall financial settlement.

The Minister has said that only one fourteenth of the total funding package is provided by student contributions at the moment. It is clear from the Select Committee report—for example, when it talks about higher top-up fees—that the introduction of tuition fees creates instability. There is always pressure to drift upwards to totally unacceptable levels. The figure of £5,000 has already been mentioned.

I should just make three or four specific points on current developments in relation to Government policy. The first is one on which we all agree. I have written to all the vice-chancellors about our proposals. There has been a range of replies, not all of which, I hasten to say, said that our suggestions were anathema. They all agree that they do not like the Office for Fair Access. Its job is one that they think they can properly do themselves.

Secondly, the Minister announced today in a written statement the figures for the new grant. It is lower than the grant that applied until 1997 under the previous Government. The upper income threshold for the full amount will be £15,200. It is estimated that only 30 per cent. will receive the full grant and a further 10 per cent. a partial grant. Given that there is a huge participation in fees relief for 58 per cent., the Government are beginning to shade down the coverage of people who receive support. The position under top-up fees is quite unclear.

I close on our strategic response to the Government's proposals. We object to them for two reasons beyond those that have already been discussed. First, they are unsustainable. Often, policies, including some of our own in government, require so much amelioration and tailoring that they yield little revenue. The Prime Minister appeared to say last week that only £500 million was coming in from the fees package. He was a little more modest than the Secretary of State, who suggested that it might be £700 million. It is still a very small amount, even if it is new money, which we doubt.

It is clear from the Select Committee report that the cost of the fees subsidy is already more than £800 million. A recent written answer suggested that it might be £1 billion. That is solved by cutting the Treasury interest rate. Once we move to top-up fees, the figures become much larger. I cannot see a Chancellor of the Exchequer in the future wanting to draw the cheque for that. There will be some reneging on undertakings if those loans are allowed to escalate.

There is also the issue of indefensibility. In relation to that, I would single out students with incomes just above the qualifying thresholds who, with their families, will be under severe pressures. Those with lower income levels are also, in one way or another, deterred from the process. It is wrong to say that students do not make a contribution. They suffer the opportunity cost of not earning, and they have additional maintenance expenditure through university participation. As the hon. Member for Newbury said, there is also the question of where the fees process will stop. If Governments think that they can charge students, why should they think that they cannot charge people at school?

3.21 pm

The Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education (Alan Johnson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). As others have said, he approached the debate in a constructive and rather novel way by describing his survey of 1,000 constituents. He said that I might be getting a bit tired of debating this issue, but we cannot have too many debates on it. In this particular forum, I should like to leave aside yah-boo party politics and deal with the issue in the way that the hon. Gentleman has.

The hon. Gentleman has raised a number of points that I will consider further, but I also have some immediate responses that will allow him to send a copy of the *Hansard* of this debate to the 1,000 constituents to whom he referred—if he can afford it. His constituents made an important contribution; their prejudices about the Office for Fair Access shocked me nearly as much as their prejudices about students on media studies courses. My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) made the point that we want to link university education to industry, and ensure that graduates who come out of our universities make an important economic contribution in today's world. I make no comment on any subjects that might have been

[Alan Johnson]

studied for 200 or 300 years, but media studies courses make, and will continue to make, an important contribution to today's economy. It is saloon-bar, red-neck language—not that I would accuse the good citizens of Northavon of that—to suggest that, because media studies has become an important topic, it is irrelevant. It is not irrelevant. The higher education sector needs to get that message across.

I have listened carefully to the points that have been made. I remain convinced that the Government's strategy is the only coherent one for the future of higher education. I want to explain why I believe that a variable fee, which is the prime topic of today's debate, is the right approach. I want to deal with the effects and the perceived effects of our proposals, and finally I shall put the proposals in context of the Government's wider agenda. As usual, there will not be enough time to cover all the points raised.

As the hon. Member for Northavon will accept, he has a problem not just with top-up fees, but with fees in the first place. The starting point for any such debate has to be the Dearing report. I am perfectly willing to listen to the views of the 1,000 good citizens of Northavon, but let us not forget what Dearing said. His was a cross-party report, which was supported across party boundaries. It was a national committee of inquiry that produced the most radical and thorough analysis of higher education since the Robbins report in 1963. The Dearing committee was unequivocal in its view, and Dearing himself put it well in a recent speech. Higher education is different from post-16 education where, although too many youngsters are leaving school at 16, they have a right to stay on. Dearing said that, given that higher education is a major benefit that is not available as of right to all our citizens, it is equitable that those who are qualified and choose to take it should put something back in the pot when they become earners. If it is unfair to ask graduates to pay more of the cost, why is it fair to ask non-graduate taxpayers to do so? That is at the heart of this debate.

The hon. Member for Northavon spoke about the effect on women. That is an important issue, and perhaps we have not paid enough attention to it—I shall certainly do so in future. However, the big success story is the number of women going into higher education. They were in the minority in higher education—34 per cent.—as recently as 1996, but now account for 55 per cent. of those going into higher education, so the introduction of tuition fees did not affect that at all.

The basis of the hon. Gentleman's argument was the time taken to pay back the loan. A recent Institute for Fiscal Studies report said that that would take an average of 10 years under the Government's proposals. We have not analysed those figures carefully but, for women, 13 years—a difference of three years—sounds about right.

The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) said how important the issue of loans is for women, and how onerous the loan might be to them. I am the secretary of his fan club, and all other hon. Members here probably feel the same. However, I remind him that, although it is true that under the loan system of the previous Government—£1 billion of which still has to be paid back—there was a threshold of £20,000, once that threshold was passed by one penny, the debt would be paid back in five or seven years irrespective of whether a person had taken time out for maternity leave or had left the job market. That is a much more onerous burden, and those debts are being paid at this moment. That issue should be the subject of a debate.

The point was raised in debate in the House that we are not talking about debt in itself but about the level of debt, because by and large, under various systems, students have incurred debt. The introduction of tuition fees has not affected the number of women going to university. I repeat that our proposal is that we remove upfront tuition fees and take a purist steering, as it were. No one—not students or parents—pays anything except graduates once they are earning £15,000 a year, and then they pay on an equitable and attractive basis.

This is not credit card debt. There is no real rate of interest building up, and the loan does not have to be repaid in a short period. It is not as though the scheme takes no account of people's earnings—that would be credit card debt. It is 9 per cent. applied to the difference between the threshold and earnings. Someone on £18,500 a year would pay back £5.50 a week.

I am perfectly willing to engage in debate on the time that paying back the loan will take, but we should ask whether the scheme is an attractive proposition if we accept that graduates should make a contribution, and accept all the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde made so powerfully. We must decide whether, considering all the other options, Dearing was right. We are talking about making a contribution, not paying the total amount.

By the end of the current spending review, we will be putting £10 billion of public money into higher education, and that is—as it should be—a real increase of 6 per cent. a year in the next three years. That means that £400 for every taxpayer in the country will go into higher education. If graduates are to make a contribution, is our system the right way to provide for that?

On variability, recent research suggests that there is a 44 per cent. difference in the average returns for graduates at the two ends of the graduate pay scale. Fortuitously, I have the figures for women who study law and architecture, although I did not know that that would be a major feature of the survey that the hon. Member for Northavon conducted. Between 1993 and 1999, the returns for women graduates in law and architecture were more than 40 per cent., while those for arts degrees were below 20 per cent., so there is a big difference. That is a factor if, in trying to bring more money into the system, we ask students to pay the same amount and make exactly the same contribution.

It is unreasonable to insist that students with such different earnings prospects pay the same flat-rate fee. In a speech in February, Lord Dearing said that, with the introduction of the price competition that comes with the discretion of institutions to set fees ranging from nothing to £3,000 in what is otherwise a growth desert in the market for three-year degree students, strong competition will lead to a differentiation in fees. People will not go to the upper end of £3,000.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. For the next 30 minutes at least, we must focus our attention on community transport.

Community Transport

3.30 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): My contribution to this debate is part of a cross-party initiative by Norfolk Members. I should mention in particular the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), who cannot be present, as well as the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson), who is here, the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon), who is stuck in a Select Committee, and the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham). I am also delighted to see that the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) is present—to support the case that is being made, I suspect.

Concerns were first brought to our attention by all the community transport schemes in Norfolk, as well as the two rural transport partnerships in the county. We are all indebted to them, and to the Community Transport Association nationally, for their guidance and hard work.

Before setting out our concerns, it is important to mention that there was some discussion about which Department should respond to this debate. It is clear that the Department for Transport has the main responsibility, but the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has responsibility for the Countryside Agency, which provides grants, usually on a three-year basis, for community transport schemes. I hope that this debate will reinforce the need for co-ordination between those two Departments. The Department for Transport, in particular, needs to be aware of a developing funding crisis that is facing community transport not only in Norfolk but across the country.

The main message that I want to get across is that the Government must be applauded for providing funds to pump-prime new community transport schemes. Those have mushroomed throughout the country, and that is good. It is likely that such schemes will be the most viable model for rural public transport in the future. They are flexible, they are demand responsive and they tend to use vehicles that are small and environmentally friendly. We have all witnessed double-decker buses careering around country lanes, usually entirely empty.

The great danger is that all the good progress could be lost. The CTA—the national body—and others do not want confrontation: that is not what this debate is about. They want to work with the Government to ensure that this exciting development over the past few years is maintained and enhanced. We also aim to be constructive as a group of MPs, and we hope that the Minister will respond in a similar vein.

I wish to say something about the Norfolk schemes. There are four community transport schemes, which have been set up with rural transport partnership—RTP—funding provided by the Countryside Agency. One of them is in South Norfolk—the Diss and District Community Transport Association. It runs a minibus dial-a-ride scheme and a door-to-door service for people in rural areas. The scheme is operated by a small group of employed people, together with drivers. Its RTP funding runs out next year. The North Norfolk Community Transport Partnership in my constituency is a similar operation whose funding also runs out next year.

The North Walsham Area Community Transport Association is also in my constituency. There is a full-time co-ordinator and a part-time administrator. They operate on a low cost base from a rent-free office in North Walsham. The association has funding from the Countryside Agency, which got the whole thing established, at a rate of £18,000 per year. That has already ended—it came to an end earlier this year. It gets some funding from the county council, and the district and town and parish councils. It gets income from fares and from charges for other transport services and membership subscriptions. However, it is now living off its reserves and it cannot carry on like this for long.

The association was founded in 1999. I want to make it clear that that was made possible by Government pump-priming. The association covers 45 parishes and provides regular dial-a-ride services to local market towns, which get people from small village communities into their local town. Secondly, it provides transport to appointments at local hospitals, GPs' surgeries, dentists and so on—that is crucial in rural areas. Thirdly, it provides transport for organised groups that meet regularly for social gatherings, such as lunch clubs for elderly and disabled people.

The association also has a programme of excursions. It uses 10 volunteer drivers locally, so it is a real community effort. It also runs a hospital bus, with a paid driver, from north-east Norfolk to the new Norfolk and Norwich university hospital, which is five miles to the south of Norwich: not an accessible location for anyone relying on public transport. There has been a steady growth in the use of the association's services, and there are now some 420 return passenger trips every month. Users are mainly elderly and disabled people who cannot walk to the normal bus stop and who benefit from the fact that they can be picked up outside their front door. There are other passengers without access to a car. The services are very valuable, and passengers describe them as a lifeline, a godsend, and say that it is important that we keep those services.

The fourth scheme in Norfolk with the benefit of rural transport partnership funding is called "kickstart". It is a really innovative moped loan scheme that enables young people, primarily, to access employment and training. If a person is stuck in a small village that does not have a normal bus service, it is very difficult to get access to employment. The scheme has helped a significant number of people in Norfolk to access employment and training; its funding runs out next year as well.

There are other schemes with alternative sources of funding: a Norwich door-to-door scheme, of which I suspect the hon. Member for Norwich, North is aware. That scheme is specifically for disabled people and those with other mobility problems who are excluded from using traditional forms of public transport. There are other, existing schemes that have used RTP funding to expand their services. The West Norfolk community transport project, an excellent community car scheme, covers six parishes around Heacham. It is primarily used by people who need to get to hospital appointments. There are also the Swaffham rural links and Wymondham flexibus services. There are lots of schemes cropping up all over the place, all with the benefit of that central funding; the schemes tackle social exclusion and rural isolation and they give people

[Norman Lamb]

independence. Last week, I met a group of residents from Wigston in Leicestershire; it looked like they were going to lose their housing estate bus service. For those elderly people, that bus is a lifeline.

The Government's social exclusion unit recently published a report entitled "Making the Connections: Final Report on Transport and Social Exclusion". The North Walsham association was used as a case study in the chapter entitled "Solutions to the problem". The chapter demonstrates how community transport reduces social exclusion.

The common problem is where to get sustainable funding once the pump-priming ends. Schemes have done an awful lot of work to secure alternative funding. The North Norfolk Community Transport Partnership says that

"We have sought to secure alternative funding through trusts, Town and Parish donations and other funding bodies. However, in the current financial and investment climate, whereby many trusts have seen their stock-market investment funds seriously depleted over the last year, such bodies are unable to offer any substantial financial support. Most Town and parish councils have very limited funds and the most our organisation has ever been offered is a donation of £250, (this being from quite well-off town councils such as Fakenham and Holt), otherwise donations usually amount to something in the region of £25–£50."

That level of funding simply will not support the services that they provide.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on obtaining this Adjournment debate, which has the support of all Norfolk Members. Following from what he just said, it seems to many of us—I know that the Minister will be aware of this—that sustainable funding is the crucial element. Our fear at the meeting that we attended on 6 June was that as more and more schemes are set up, there is a danger that those set up behind them will collapse because of lack of funding. What we are looking for from the Minister is more suggestions of how we can get sustainable funding. During the past four years, Norfolk county council has spent from £171,000 to a planned £318,000 on community transport, but that may lead to cuts in local bus services. I support what the hon. Gentleman says.

Norman Lamb: I am grateful for that intervention, and I entirely agree with the Gentleman's points. The county council has explained to me that the only way in which it can get extra funding for community transport is to reduce subsidies on traditional bus services. That is a difficult process and takes time to achieve. Wholesale axing of existing services is simply not an option, because so many people rely on them.

The problem is that there is a very significant amount of money flowing in from the Countryside Agency to get those schemes started, but because so many started at roughly the same time, they are all coming to the end of their three-year funding period in a narrow time frame. Consequently, there is simply no prospect of the county council being able to take on the full burden following the withdrawal of Countryside Agency funding.

There sometimes seems to be an obsession with funding only new and innovative schemes. That is important, but must not happen to the detriment of other schemes that are already working successfully. There is a danger of organisations straining to come up with some new package simply to attract funding. There is also a danger of spending a disproportionate amount of time pursuing funding, which is an inefficient use of management time. The process of applying for funding, then losing out in the bidding process, can be soul destroying. Uncertainty of funding will also lead to those employed in the sector seeking more security elsewhere, resulting in a loss of the skills and experience that need to be retained in the sector to build on the very successful foundations that have been laid.

One of the local operators in Norfolk has said:

"Such 'short-term' funding has hampered an expansionist ethos for our service and the general feeling with our members and that of many dial-a-ride operators is one of an impending 'shut-down' of the service as a whole."

That is not conducive to an expansion of such schemes.

I am sure that the Minister will accept that the schemes are unlikely ever to be profitable. They provide a public service in some of the most remote areas of the country. They fill the gaps that conventional transport cannot fill. Those running the schemes tell us that they may well be able to survive with tapering funding. They also say that, ideally, they would like to be locally funded, a view that I strongly share, but there must be some transmission mechanism to get from nationally provided pump-priming to sustainable local funding. Three years is simply not long enough to build a strong passenger base and for the county council to reorganise its funding to provide sufficient support for community transport.

Those in the sector feel that they are caught in something of a tussle between central and local government, both believing in community transport but neither coming up with a basis for sustainable funding. The Government's commitment in principle is very clear. The 10-year transport plan declares:

"There will be additional funding for other types of service"

than the traditional sort,

"including those run by the voluntary sector, community projects (such as the setting up and operation of social car and community minibus schemes) and flexible innovative schemes (which could include taxi-based services)."

The Government are there in principle, but the funding situation seems to be less optimistic than that statement of principle might suggest.

The Countryside Agency itself appears to be in something of a funding crisis. We have been told of concerns of

"appalling financial planning, and grossly inadequate communications."

I do not know whether that is true, but that is the concern that has been expressed. An embargo was imposed on applications to the vital villages programme, part of the funding stream for community transport, back in mid-April. Although the embargo was lifted in June, it seems that many transport services due to receive funding will still have to be shelved. That inevitably means that much of the work by voluntary groups throughout the country will be wasted and expectations will be dashed. The Countryside Agency claims that that was because of an over-subscription in applications for rural transport partnership funding,

but many believe that it is really because of over-spending on mapping work undertaken by the Countryside Agency.

Will the Minister investigate the situation? I appreciate that it is not his departmental responsibility, but it appears to be putting at risk an important part of the Government's transport strategy for rural areas. Will he also consider calling a summit of everyone with an interest in community transport? It could include the funders, local authorities, operators and service users, coming together with a view to ensuring that existing schemes are given the opportunity to flourish and a second aim of expanding rather than contracting the network.

Finally, as Paul Gray, co-ordinator of the North Walsham Area Community Transport Association, says:

"Quietly, and without too much fuss, community transport does a great job every day. Any community bus driver will instantly recognise the unreserved appreciation shown by his or her passengers on a frequent basis. The message I carry to you is simple: A modest investment in rural community transport would represent a significant payback in the quality of life in a rural environment."

3.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Tony McNulty): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) not only on securing this debate and providing us with an opportunity to discuss the important role of community transport, but on the manner in which he introduced it. I know that there are concerns and that they are shared throughout parties and different levels of government in many areas, including Norfolk. I shall not dwell on much of what he has already said, but the Department appreciates that community and voluntary transport has a key role to play in all regions of the country, both urban and rural.

As an aside, I should say that the rigidity of the modernisation of the House should be examined. As the hon. Gentleman said, this is clearly a Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs debate rather than a Department for Transport debate, but he could have secured a DEFRA Minister to respond only by losing this slot, because of the departmental timetable, and hoping and praying that he got another slot in September, October or the 12th of Never. That point may need to be considered.

Throughout Government, we understand that there are concerns. I should say that I shall render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, so I shall make no promises about chasing up matters that are properly DEFRA's, but ensure that colleagues in DEFRA get notice of the concerns from me as well as simply from reading *Hansard*.

The hon. Gentleman was right to highlight the social exclusion unit report and the notion of transport as a key factor in overcoming social exclusion in both rural and urban areas. That is important not only for income, gender, race or disability—which are perhaps more relevant factors in urban areas—but for geographic isolation and all that follows from the rural infrastructure.

I shall come on to the specific issues in a moment, but as the hon. Gentleman said, we are talking about, in relative terms, a success story. A lot has happened in recent years, and I commend and thank the many volunteers who work in community transport, as well as those who are employed by the schemes. The breadth of the community transport sector and its activities is important, but we must remember that services are disparate and often run at a local level. When focusing on some of the localised schemes, it is all too easy to lose sight of the sheer scale of the operation in the community transport arena.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Community Transport Association, which represents the majority of schemes throughout the country, estimates that there are some 5,000 schemes in the UK that between them are running some 60,000 minibuses. They do so with the help of a quarter of a million volunteers, and 10,000 full-time paid drivers. They deliver some 5 million trips for almost 2 million people with mobility problems. I do not say that to diminish the problems that the hon. Gentleman referred to concerning the Norfolk-specific schemes, but simply to put the matter into context. By any measure that is an impressive record, and the community transport sector should be very proud of it. It is perhaps all the more impressive when we consider that much of the activity is taking place in the voluntary sector.

We have heard today—and I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the way in which he raised the matter—that the community and voluntary sector faces many challenges not least in funding, and I fully appreciate the difficulties to which uncertainty over future funding and the complexities of funding applications themselves can give rise. Any scheme will have at least one or two volunteers, if not an employee, simply looking for funding streams, and seeking to translate and fill in the relevant forms. For a small operation, simply pulling together all the information needed for a funding application can be a daunting and time-consuming task.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): I associate myself with the speech made by the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). One of the problems is that Norwich is seen as the centre of the universe in Norfolk. It is the cul-de-sac of the nation, and the many elderly people who gravitate into Norfolk—who will increasingly do so during the next few years—demand the right to transport such as buses or rail lines that were closed by Beeching, because they cannot drive cars.

Mr. McNulty: I would not dispute that point either, but the issue of sustainability is key to what the hon. Member for North Norfolk suggests. Having to repeat that time after time for different funders, and then repeating the same exercise, sometimes as soon as the following year, for continuation of that funding, could be the straw that breaks the camel's back. Equally, however, we know that community and voluntary transport schemes do not give up easily. With their personal commitment to the people that they serve and their professionalism in providing transport services, they will do everything in their power to ensure that their schemes are able to continue. Indeed, that tenacity and dedication are what has led us to discuss these issues today.

[Mr. McNulty]

As the hon. Gentleman said, concerns have been expressed about recent funding problems affecting the Countryside Agency's rural transport partnership. The Countryside Agency administers the grant on behalf of DEFRA, not the DFT, and the overall level of funding allocated to the agency as a whole is ultimately the responsibility of DEFRA Ministers. Officials work closely with DEFRA and the Countryside Agency to ensure that the use of the RTP grant is consistent with, and adds value to, the Department's own rural transport programmes.

The RTP received a considerable increase in funding following the publication of the rural White Paper, as hon. Members will know. That includes many community transport enhancements, such as minibuses, and travel co-ordinators. I do not want to introduce a discordant note—I know that some people think that I regard it as my duty to introduce discord where there is consensus—but I do not think that articles such as the one entitled "Bus stops" in *The Guardian* today by the CTA are terribly helpful or add much to our deliberations on what sustainability is all about. The article is not terribly helpful—it is not terribly accurate—and the words

"Shaving 6 inches off one of the proposed new lanes of the M25 could probably have covered the costs."

are not terribly helpful or useful either.

The hon. Member for North Norfolk knows that there was a moratorium on the RTP fund for a few weeks, but that has been resolved and £2 million extra has been found. He will also know that DEFRA will review the RTP grant scheme to build on its successes, not to cut it. The outcome of that review will be made available in October and will go through DEFRA's normal budgetary processes to determine future funding. As I have said, I shall ensure that DEFRA gets to learn of the specifics of the Norfolk schemes to which the hon. Gentleman referred. He has kindly said that Norfolk county council has been a major beneficiary of our funding for rural bus services. In fact, Norfolk county council receives the single highest amount of rural bus challenge subsidy grant each year. It is currently over £2.3 million, and it supports 66 services in the county. That support reflects the rural nature of large parts of the county. Norfolk has also been allocated nearly £3 million for eight projects that were successful in the rural bus challenge.

We are studying the regulatory regime and the funding streams that are available because the Department for Transport considers that important. The community voluntary transport schemes are vital in the mix of transport provision. I accept that, in some of the most rural parts of Norfolk, the mix of transport provision is not a mix, but the community transport provision is relied on. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) may regard Norwich as the centre of the universe in terms of Norfolk, but he and others will know that, to all intents and purposes, London is the centre of the universe.

We want to do all that we can to ensure that the voluntary and community schemes thrive. As we have heard today, the funding issue is the key factor in determining how the sector can continue and develop effectively. It is important that all those involved in funding, including national and local government as well as other funding providers, are fully aware of how their decisions can affect the future viability of community schemes. It is important that they can share their experiences, learn from others and develop their funding policies with the broadest understanding of the sector. I accept the important point about the sustainability of the projects.

In August, I shall be hosting a meeting of chief executives of voluntary organisations in the transport sector to discuss the Department's role in support of the voluntary sector, and many other issues. It will include discussion of our direct role as funders of services such as the Community Transport Association's advice service to which we give an annual grant—currently £100,000—as well as other issues that affect the voluntary sector.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): My hon. Friend will know that Derbyshire is at the heart of community transport. It was the area that lobbied for the fuel duty rebate to be extended to community transport services. He knows that, a short time ago, I hosted three seminars for the Community Transport Association about transport and social exclusion. In his discussions with transport organisations, will he take account of the points that arose in the seminars about which I shall give him details?

Mr. McNulty: I was about to reflect on that matter. In addition, officials will be setting up a meeting of the key funders of voluntary transport to discuss funding and what we can do to enable the community and voluntary sectors to develop to the benefit of the communities, both rural and urban, that they serve. I have not been told that I have been invited, but I will ensure that I am.

I was about to say, before my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) intervened, that she has asked me to meet a delegation of hon. Members and others about community transport, social exclusion and much of the work that has developed from the seminars to which she referred. I am happy to do so. I am equally happy either to broaden that meeting to include Norfolk Members, although on reflection, it is more likely that I will have a separate meeting with them about Norfolk—which includes Norwich, of course—to discuss specifically the micro and broader schemes. With hon. Members' indulgence, the meeting will not be held before the recess—as that would give us about 16 hours within which to fix it up.

The resolution of local issues might be better served collectively if the meeting were held after I have forewarned DEFRA about the issues that have been raised in the debate, after I have met the voluntary sectors in August to discuss what they are doing for community transport and after the forum or summit with the key funding bodies. There will then be something of substance to discuss in the meeting about the Norfolk schemes.

We are keenly aware throughout the Government, not only in DEFRA and the Department for Transport, that pump-priming and getting in place vital services is

one thing, but that we need to work with others to ensure that such matters are mainstream. I accept the point made by the hon. Member for North Norfolk that local transport programmes and local authorities should pick up such matters. I thank him again not just for instigating this debate, the subject of which is important, but for the tenor and the way in which he introduced it. I am grateful for that, and I will see you all in September or October.

Knowledge-Based Economy

4 pm

Jon Cruddas (Dagenham): I want to raise some issues concerning the demand for labour in the UK economy, which has some important implications for my constituents. I shall relate those to some of the assumptions made by Government policy makers about employment, education and skills, and then touch on some issues concerning labour market regulation.

To put it simply, it seems that much of the debate on public policy has been premised on specific assumptions and data sets concerning future demand for labour, which I think are more contentious than is sometimes assumed. Those assumptions centre on the notion of the new knowledge-based economy, which has been a dominant theme in Government thinking since 1997 and assumes that we are witnessing a profound change in the nature of work, fuelled by globalisation and the revolution in information and communications technologies. It offers a seductive political vision of the future in the development of so-called smart technologies and the new economy overtaking the so-called old economy with its more traditional patterns of work. The assumption is of rapid growth in scientific, technical, managerial and professional work and a corresponding decline in traditional forms of manual labour. Because of the liberating assumptions regarding new technology, Government emphasis is placed on supply-side strategy to equip people for the new global revolution in work where market failure occurs.

There is a massive amount of literature about the new knowledge-based economy. During Labour's first term, that informed much of the thinking in the Department of Trade and Industry, culminating in a White Paper on the subject. It also seems to inform thinking within the Department for Education and Skills, and I want to examine some of those assumptions and tease out some of the thinking behind the Department's policies.

Ministerial speeches are littered with references to the knowledge-based economy. Much Government analysis seems to presume that future demand is almost entirely driven by high-wage, high-skilled, knowledge-driven labour and that is what I want to consider this afternoon. I want to consider what underpins some recent statements from Ministers. For example, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills stated this year:

> "Demand for graduates is very strong, and research shows that 80 per cent. of the 1.7 million new jobs which are expected to be created by the end of the decade will be in occupations which normally recruit those with higher education qualifications."

During a recent debate in the House, the new Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education stated that the Institute for Employment Research showed that 1.7 million jobs will be created in this country between 1999 and 2010 and that nine out of 10 of those jobs will require higher education and graduate education.

I want to ask the Minister a number of questions. First, is that a correct reading of the research? The statistics come from "Skills in England 2001", and as far as I can see, the relevant quotation is on page 7 of that report, which states:

[Jon Cruddas]

"This rapid growth in the numbers employed in a range of occupational groups where qualification levels are currently relatively high, combined with the decline of several occupational groupings where qualifications are relatively low, will lead to around 4 in 5 of the new jobs being at least at NVQ level 3, or equivalent, by the end of the decade."

Two pages later, it states:

"It is likely that around 8 out of 10 of all of the new jobs may well be at NVQ levels 3 or 4 or their equivalent."

I understand that NVQ level 5 relates to postgraduate degrees; NVQ level 4 relates to first degrees, teaching qualifications, nursing qualifications, HNC, HND and the RSA higher diploma; NVQ level 3 relates to 2 or more A-levels, the RSA advanced diploma, ONC, OND, national BTEC, City and Guilds advanced craft certificate, trade apprenticeship and advanced GNVQ. It seems clear that ministerial statements that eight out of 10 new jobs require graduate qualifications is not quite the case, in that the 80 per cent. also covers the demand for labour for people with NVQ level 3 qualifications.

Table 3.5 of the research report, which was the basis for those recommendations, states that 55 per cent. of new jobs will require NVQ level 4 or higher by 2010, and not 80 per cent., the other 25 per cent. being the disaggregated figure relating to NVQ level 3 in terms of extra demand for labour. The ministerial statements do not refer to replacement labour demanded by 2010. What would the total demand for higher qualifications be as a percentage of actual jobs in the economy if we took on board replacement jobs as well as the figure for new jobs—1.7 million—by 2010? Again, to quote the "Skills in England" document, page 9 states:

"The volume of replacement demand that is likely to be required, and thus the relevant skills to go with them, may well be around 5 times as great as the volume of new jobs and the skills that go with them."

What happens when we combine that replacement labour with the expanded demand for new jobs? If they are added together—as shown in one of the tables in the report—the five growth categories in the English labour market by 2010 will be clerical and service-related elementary occupations, administrative and clerical occupations, sales occupations, caring personal service occupations—

4.6 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.21 pm

On resuming—

Jon Cruddas: To recap briefly, I was making a point about replacement labour, in addition to new jobs, by 2010. Once we take on board replacement demand, the top five growing occupations cover elementary occupations, administrative and clerical work, sales, caring and personal service occupations, and managers and proprietors in agriculture and services.

We need to take on board replacement labour and the fact that the estimates for new jobs also cover NVQ level 3. Page 79 of the research report states:

"By 2010, on the basis of a fixed qualification rate assumption, nearly 30 per cent. of those in employment are expected to be qualified to NVQ level 4/5 or equivalent".

So, we are not talking about 80 per cent. When the statistics are broken down further they show that, by 2010, the figure for those in employment required to be first degree graduates or postgraduates will be 22.1 per cent. That is to say, in terms of the demand for labour by 2010, 77.9 per cent. of jobs will not require a degree. That compares with the earlier assumption that about eight out of 10 jobs will require a degree.

All the data imply that growth is occurring at both ends of the labour market. I accept that there are growth areas in professional, associate professional and managerial work, but there are also growth areas in relation to routine, low-waged and low-skilled jobs, many of which are in the service sector and which include work in care homes, sales, cleaning and security, and routine clerical work.

That suggests a growing US-style polarisation between a primary and secondary labour market, both of which are expanding. The primary labour market will cover some 21 per cent. of all jobs by 2010. If there is 50 per cent. participation in higher education, by 2010 two graduates will be after every one job in that primary labour market. Does that mean that graduates—many with significant debts—will have to move further down the labour market? That would shut off opportunities for those with fewer qualifications. How do people without a degree break into an over-subscribed primary labour market? What are the training and education options on offer for that group?

It is interesting to compare the statistics that I mentioned with those for the United States. US Federal Government projections of labour market demand in 2010 suggest that no more than 21.8 per cent. of the entire work force will need a degree or a higher qualification, which is very close to the 22.1 per cent. estimate for this country. It should also be remembered that a US bachelor's degree is probably equivalent to our HND or foundation degree.

The US is often seen as a seductive model in Government policy-making circles and as the classic model of the new, knowledge-based economy. Further Federal Government research indeed states that three of the 10 fastest-growing occupational classifications by 2010 will be at the cutting edge of the new economy: computer software engineers requiring bachelor's degrees, and registered nurses and computer support specialists also requiring associate degrees. However, seven of the 10 fastest-growing occupations in the USA by 2010 will require only short-term or moderate on-the-job training: fast-food workers, retail workers, clerks, security guards, waitresses, cashiers, office clerks and the like. Put simply, the knowledge-based economy will not be on the horizon for huge and expanding sectors of the US labour market by 2010.

In the United Kingdom and the US the knowledge-based economy relates to about 21 per cent. of jobs, and it is a much more segmented labour market than one would otherwise assume. The majority of people are excluded from it and they operate in more traditional yet expanding labour markets. That is confirmed by data, rather than projected demand, on the fastest-growing occupations since 1992. In terms of absolute employment growth since 1992, the fastest-growing

occupations have been, first, in the four long-established services of sales assistants, data input clerks, storekeepers and receptionists, secondly in state-dominated health and education services, and thirdly in the caring occupations: care assistants, welfare and community workers, nursery nurses and so on.

In short, in terms of the demand for labour in the past 10 years, employment growth has been concentrated in occupations scarcely at the cutting edge of the new economy. For example, the fastest-growing occupation in the past 10 years has been hairdressing, and until 2010, the demand for labour in the knowledge-based economy will be in a small minority of very highly paid jobs for those who are highly trained. At the same time, the real growth—and much future growth—is in low-paid, routine and unskilled employment in occupations that have been pre-eminent for more than 50 years.

I want to consider the framework that underscores some public policy. First, there is the spatial dimension. The Department of Trade and Industry report, "A Regional Perspective on the Knowledge-Driven Economy" shows the enormous disparities in prospects for workers in different geographical locations. The conclusion, which will be no surprise to many people, is that the poorer the community that people live in, the less likely they are to plug into the new, high-wage world of work, and the greater the likelihood of their participating in the growing low-wage, low-skilled economy. Put simply, it is more difficult for my constituents in Dagenham on the east side of London to plug into the changes than for those in Westminster and Chelsea.

My second point, of which the Minister is aware, concerns the very low in-work demands being made on people's basic literacy and numeracy skills in much of the labour market. For example, the massive adult literacy survey of employees in Scotland provides some shocking statistics, and there is no reason to suppose that the figures for the rest of the UK are any different. A sizeable proportion of the Scottish work force are currently in jobs that demand virtually no reading or writing skills. The figures for reading skills are that 34 per cent. rarely or never use information from computers; 26 per cent. rarely or never use letters or memos; 35 per cent. rarely or never use bills, invoices or spreadsheets; and 53 per cent. rarely or never use manuals, reference books and catalogues.

The findings on writing skills are even more shocking: 37 per cent. rarely or never write or fill out letters or memos; 42 per cent. rarely or never write or fill out forms, bills, budgets or invoices; and 51 per cent. rarely or never write reports or articles. Given the demand for labour, there are some uncomfortable questions to be asked about what is achieved by offering adults in those jobs adult literacy training on the supply side without reform on the demand side. A more interventionist role is needed to consider the nature of the jobs being done and the needs of people who do them.

Thirdly, I want to speak about the DFES assumptions about the wage premiums that result from some of the qualifications. The DFES assumes that five good GCSE results produce a financial return of about 20 per cent. to the individual; NVQ level 2, which is what the employer training pilots offer, produces a rate of return that is so low it is not significant, reinforcing the argument that in a huge segment of the labour market, employers are not necessarily looking for employees with even basic literacy and numeracy skills, which is truly shocking for our economy's productive capacity.

I raise all of the above in order to chuck out a few points and obtain some responses. First, what are the assumptions of the future demands for labour requiring a degree by 2010? Secondly, will the Department accept that here, as in the USA, virtually 80 per cent. of jobs in 2010 will not require a degree, contrary to some of the inferences surrounding the public policy debates that are about to begin? Thirdly, what can be achieved by offering to adults publicly funded vocational education and training to level 2? How will that influence the broader issue of productivity movement? Is the strategy of incentivising training on the supply side workable without changing the nature of the demand for labour? Does the Government's in-work benefits regime reinforce and reincentivise low-wage, low-skilled jobs rather than reform them? How can a voluntary strategy operate without our seeking to regularise those low-wage, low-skilled labour markets more thoroughly, so that it will reincentivise investment in people and technology by choking off the low-wage, low-skilled options for employers?

Overall, is it not the case that the preconditions based on a stylised view of the world—the so-called knowledge-based economy—distract us from the real problems around the current and future demand for labour? We should prioritise a more interventionist agenda for those growing low-wage, low-skill labour markets, and seek to alter the demand for cheap, unskilled labour, rather than seeing our labour market problems as market failure on the supply side. That implies regulation, which boosts productivity, rather than deregulation, which reinforces our low-wage, low-skilled productivity capacity.

4.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas) on securing the debate. It is an important debate and he raises several significant issues.

The White Paper on skills, "Realising Our Potential", which was launched last week, addresses some of my hon. Friend's concerns about how we prioritise lower-level skills in the same way as higher-level skills. We must be conscious not only of the economic arguments but the social inclusion arguments. People with low-level skills become parents and their attitude towards education often influences the educational potential and aspirations of their children. It is misleading to argue that higher-level or lower-level skills are more important. We need a rounded approach that tackles the fact that by 2010 there will be more jobs requiring higher-level skills. We have a responsibility to recognise that we must increase the number of people who can access adult literacy and numeracy skills and level 2 qualifications.

We should not apologise for our commitment to ensure that approximately 50 per cent. of young people experience higher education by 2010. We also aspire to ensure that by 2010 90 per cent. of young people have qualifications and skills that help them to access skilled employment. It is also important to mention that

[Mr. Ivan Lewis]

foundation degrees, to which we have made a commitment, such as HNDs—my hon. Friend referred to them—have always been classed as higher education. They provide the skills that our economy needs. Some people claim that foundation degrees represent a dumbing down. High-quality courses such as foundation degrees ensure that our graduates fit the needs of the economy far more than they have in the past, and that we have an appropriate mix of academic skills and work-based skills.

My hon. Friend raised several statistical questions. It is important to recognise that currently in the UK we have relatively low qualification levels compared with other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries: 17 per cent. of the UK labour force is educated to degree level, compared with 28 per cent. in the United States. Of the 2.1 million additional jobs expected to be created by the end of the decade, 80 per cent. will be in occupations that normally recruit those with higher educational qualifications. It is accurate to say that a knowledge economy requires that more young people get up to degree level and we are able to ensure that our competitiveness and productivity are where they need to be in a global economy.

It is also right that we continue to stimulate demand for lower-level skills, which we know will be a major challenge. We must ensure that far more people leave the compulsory education system with at least basic decent qualifications than has historically been the case—various policies should lead to that—but we must also ensure that those people who are at present in the labour market or who are about to enter it also have opportunities throughout their lives to upskill and reskill.

My hon. Friend discussed the need for an approach to skills that is sensitive to individual sectoral and regional labour market priorities and requirements. The proposals that we announced in the White Paper only last week were a real attempt to move away from a "one size fits all" national approach.

The White Paper set out several key principles. We need greater clarity about the rights and responsibilities of key stakeholders, particularly the state, employers and individuals. We need a system of education and training with greater transparency and simplicity for its users, whether individuals or employers, and one that is far more responsive to their needs. Finally, we need a far more sophisticated system that can respond to the needs of regions and sectors.

Some of the key reforms that were included in the White Paper directly address some of my hon. Friend's concerns about the balance of priorities and investment of public resources. We announced a new universal entitlement to free learning, including advice and guidance for a first level 2 qualification—a very important step forward. We also said that in cases of proven market failure, whether regional or sectoral, the level 2 commitment would be extended to level 3. We said that we would make available a weekly maintenance allowance to support young people, particularly post-19 students, who want to participate in full-time further education vocational courses.

In addition, we designated information and communications technology as the third essential skill for life alongside literacy and numeracy. My hon. Friend said that 7 million adults in this country lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, but we have made significant progress on that problem. By 2004, 750,000 people who do not have basic literacy and numeracy skills will have them, and we expect that figure to increase to 1.5 million by 2007. By designating ICT as an essential skill alongside literacy and numeracy, we acknowledge that it is not a luxury but an essential requirement for employability and social inclusion in the modern world.

The White Paper also reiterated the Government's commitment to the expansion and development of modern apprenticeships. People say that it is a shame that we no longer have apprenticeships in this country, but in fact some 234,000 young people are participating in modern apprenticeships. We expect 28 per cent. of young people to be undertaking some form of modern apprenticeship by 2004. It is vital, in terms of stimulating demand, to reform the adult information and guidance services.

We also announced in the White Paper the introduction of the sector skills council project to replace national training organisations. By next year, some 90 per cent. of the work force in the public and private sectors will be covered by sector skills councils. That should ensure that decisions about education and training strongly reflect the needs of particular sectors. We want the sector skills councils to be more effective, more employer-led and more strategic, and to have better labour market information than the national training organisations ever did.

The White Paper also proposes sector agreements. If sectors can make specific agreed proposals about how they will meet their labour market requirements, the Government will facilitate the implementation of the agreements over a period. The White Paper also contains the announcement of the employer training pilots to which my hon. Friend referred. We said that we would use the lessons of the successful pilots to inform the development of a national employer training scheme aimed particularly at those who are employed in small and medium-sized enterprises and do not have access to the necessary training.

We have also committed ourselves to a new employer-friendly qualification framework, which will support unitisation of qualifications and credit transfer. Modern apprenticeship is not the province of young people alone; we have committed ourselves to lifting the age cap so that there is no artificial cut-off at 25. That is particularly relevant for those who reskill or upskill and need access to apprenticeship later in life. We are committed to ensuring that, in every region, our approach to skills is far more holistic than it has been. By bringing together the regional development agencies, the local learning and skills councils, Jobcentre Plus and Business Link we shall be in a better position to stimulate demand than we have been.

One of the reasons for the White Paper is the fact that the skills delivery agencies are fragmented. Lots of organisations wish to make contact with business and to stimulate demand from both business and individuals, yet until now we have not had an effective, strong and cohesive approach. For the first time, we also have a

commitment at national level to a social partnership that will drive forward the skills agenda. The TUC, the CBI and the Small Business Council are working with key Departments to give the same messages and to ensure that we achieve the step change that is needed on skills. That is an important development; for the first time, we have a national structure that brings together all the organisations charged with delivering on the skills agenda in an effective way.

All of that should demonstrate to my hon. Friend that our passion about basic skills and level 2 qualifications equals our commitment to higher education. Our objective should be to ensure that we create a compulsory education system in which far more young people stay on and progress—some of them into higher education via the conventional means or perhaps via a modern apprenticeship, and others via a high-quality vocational route into a modern apprenticeship. The curse of the education system, which we cannot afford to ignore, is the fact that too many young people drop out and blight their life chances.

We have to create more ways for young people to progress, develop and achieve within the compulsory education system. We also have to make lifelong learning a possibility for those who are already in the labour market or close to it. In order to do that, we must take a smarter approach. We must have clear national priorities in relation to basic skills and level 2 qualifications, but we must also have a system that is sufficiently responsive to the needs of regions and sectors.

I hope that I have demonstrated that our approach is more sophisticated than is sometimes articulated. We are as passionate about people who are not going to go into higher education as we are about those who are. Both are essential if we are to create a society that is both fair and economically successful. We must continue to raise the standards in our compulsory education system, but we also need to raise our game in a significant way when it comes to adults who are already in the work force and those who are close to the labour market.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 17 July 2003

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Domestic Violence

Oral Answers to Questions

The Government were asked—

Refuge Accommodation

2.30 pm

2. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford): What public funding is available to support the provision of refuge accommodation for those fleeing domestic violence. [125464]

9. **Mrs. Helen Clark** (Peterborough): What support the Government give to women's refuges. [125472]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Yvette Cooper): The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is investing £8.9 million capital funding and the Housing Corporation is providing a further £9.9 million capital funding from within its budget for refuge accommodation. In addition, support for women in refuges and other accommodation in respect of circumstances of domestic violence is also supported through the supporting people programme. This year, that stands at £34 million.

Mr. Kidney: Does the Minister agree that the providers of refuges, such as Women's Aid, do sterling work in providing places of safety for those escaping from violence? Does she accept that they do more than just provide a roof over people's heads, but give help in identifying legal advice, careers advice and child care? In developing the Government's policy for vulnerable children, does she agree with me and the Women's Aid branch in Stafford about the need for more specialist services for children, especially black and ethnic minority children who witness or suffer domestic violence themselves?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right. Support for children must be a priority. Women's refuges throughout the country do an immense amount of excellent work, usually in conjunction with local authorities and specialist services. Considerable help is already provided. The supporting people programme can be used in some circumstances to provide for child care support, too. My hon. Friend is right to identify specialist support, especially for the black and ethnic minority community. We have identified that in the consultation paper as an area where we want feedback because we need to know especially about the level of unmet need throughout the country and what further needs to be done. Investment in refuge places has increased substantially over the past few years, but we must know what further provision is necessary.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I invite the Minister to look at the provision of refuge accommodation within the wider context of social housing. Does she agree that there is a danger that, if there is no adequate availability of social housing for people to move to and begin their lives over again, creating additional refuge places will not begin to solve the problem? Given that the number of households that live in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has tripled since 1997 and the average number of social housing units completed has fallen by a third over the same period, how do the Government—looking at a joined-up approach throughout all areas of housing provision—intend to ensure not only that there is an adequate number of refuge places, but that there is adequate availability of housing for people to move to from refuges and to rebuild their lives?

Yvette Cooper: For many families suffering from domestic violence, refuge accommodation is not the appropriate response. Some can stay in their own home with appropriate support; others need different accommodation. We have substantially increased investment in refuge accommodation—capital investment for this financial year is £18.8 million compared with £2.8 million in 1997—and the number of refuge places has increased. It is right that we should ensure that there is appropriate accommodation, which is why for the first time each local authority must set out a homelessness strategy and examine the unmet need in its area and all the different types of housing need that must be met. That is also why we have set bed-and-breakfast accommodation targets, on which we are making significant progress. We need to reduce the number of families in such accommodation.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Although the Minister did not say so, I understood that she was replying also to Question 9, in which case, I call Mrs. Helen Clark.

Mrs. Clark: I welcome the answers that the Minister has given to date. I speak as the MP for Peterborough and our refuge needs more money because we have the highest level of domestic violence in Cambridgeshire—29.1 per cent. of all crimes of domestic violence that are logged. Workers at the Peterborough women's centre believe that refuges are not the only solution. Many women do not want to flee their homes. Why should they? An integrated approach is best—one that involves police, social services and women's aid agencies, as well as women's centres such as the excellent one that we have in Peterborough. Do the Government have plans to progress with such an approach?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right to say that the most effective programmes to support women and families in such situations involve different agencies and examine a wide range of options for families. Interestingly, in Harrow work has been done to help families stay in their own homes by improving security and support for them in their homes, where that is an option. Many people would prefer that option to feeling that they have been turfed out of their homes by domestic violence. My hon. Friend is right to say that a

[Yvette Cooper]

wide range of options needs to be explored in every case, and I commend the work to that effect that is being done in Peterborough.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister referred to bed-and-breakfast accommodation, and said that sometimes it is unsuitable for people in this predicament. The Government recognise that about 15 per cent. of all homelessness is caused by domestic violence. Against that benchmark, can the Minister tell the House what percentage of people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation are there as a result of domestic violence?

Yvette Cooper: I do not have those figures to hand, but I will be happy to write to the hon. Gentleman about that.

The Minister for Children (Margaret Hodge): It may help if I add to the spirit of this cross-ministerial response. Of those households that have been accepted as homeless and in priority need, only 15 per cent. were placed in refuges; 30 per cent. were placed in council or housing association properties; and 25 per cent. decided to stay with friends or relatives. Refuges are important, but there can be more suitable accommodation for some individuals and their families.

Rape Crisis Centres

4. **Bob Russell** (Colchester): What (a) financial and (b) other assistance is given to national umbrella organisations representing rape crisis helpline groups which deal with victims of domestic violence. [125466]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): Since April 2001, the Home Office has been providing core funding to the Rape Crisis Federation. The grant to the RCF in 2002–03 was £432,000 and we plan to offer a similar level of funding during 2003–04. Home Office officials regularly meet RCF representatives to discuss that organisation's work.

Bob Russell: I thank the Minister for that positive response and I hope that we can build on it. I am sure that he is aware that the Rape Crisis Federation Wales and England is struggling with funding for setting up a national database for local rape crisis centres to collate figures of sexual violence—which, sadly, is committed in the family environment as well as by strangers.

I understand that an application for funding was recently made to the Home Office because a number of centres around the country are closing as a result of a lack of funding. We need to realise that these centres have not only a voluntary aspect, but paid professional staff, too. I should like to place on the record the excellent work of the Colchester rape crisis line. We need the centres around the country to assist the increasing numbers of households where domestic violence is taking place. In the last 24 hours it has been announced that, in the past year, the number of recorded rapes has gone up by 27 per cent.

Paul Goggins: It is true that the grant made to the Rape Crisis Federation is intended to help it to provide core national services; they may or may not include the kind of database referred to by the hon. Gentleman. Finding funding for the 43 local rape crisis centres is something that the Government view as a local responsibility. Two or three of the centres have difficulties at the moment. We are working with the Department of Health to ensure that, wherever possible, local rape crisis centres can discuss with the local primary care trusts how funding might be gained from the primary care trusts. The work of local rape crisis centres and helplines is absolutely essential in providing a local access point and local support. It is critical that those centres should be able to continue their important work.

Funding

5. **Ms Debra Shipley** (Stourbridge): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that (a) the basic standards for under-eights' day care services are met for the children who live in women's refuges and (b) statutory funding is provided to enable these services to be provided. [125467]

The Minister for Children (Margaret Hodge): The sure start unit has worked closely with colleagues in Ofsted to recognise the unique position of women's refuges in providing child care. The national standards for under-eights' day care, introduced in 2001, represent a minimum quality baseline and those standards, through an agreed protocol with refuge organisations, are being interpreted flexibly by Ofsted when it inspects women's refuges. Local authorities are funded to promote new child care places generally, and they will work in partnership with refuges where appropriate.

Ms Shipley: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply. However, the latest research shows that, when asked, children say that what they most value in refuges is safety and someone to talk to. Given the Government measures to ensure that those support services and safety measures will not be reduced, will she give an assurance that there will be adequate statutory funding to meet national standards?

Margaret Hodge: I can assure my hon. Friend that in the new environment of a children, young persons and families department, the integrated support necessary to meet the needs of children, particularly those in vulnerable and distressed circumstances, can be better addressed where local authorities have statutory obligations in relation to children and their families. We clearly have to ensure that those statutory obligations are met, particularly in relation to women with children in women's refuges.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): I am sure that the Minister will recognise and be well aware that women's refuges are not only a refuge for women but for children, who suffer terribly when there is domestic violence. I am sure that we agree on that. However, the Minister might not be aware that at the Peckham women's refuge, for example, there is provision for only 20 hours of social service work for up to 32 children, which, as I am sure she will quickly calculate, is less than one hour per week per child. The children involved are at their most vulnerable and they need the most help.

I was very concerned about the statement made by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills this morning about funding. We are all aware that social services funding is already squeezed. My concern is that, under the new arrangements announced this morning, there will be even less funding for such matters. Will the Minister give me an assurance that there will be proper funding?

Margaret Hodge: The hon. Lady is right to draw attention to the fact that there are more children than adults in women's refuges, which clearly need to provide services that reflect the needs of the individuals occupying them. I cannot comment on the issue that the hon. Lady has brought up, but if she writes to me, I will certainly investigate it. I repeat the assurance given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills both this morning and last night that children's social services budgets will be protected if not increased in the transfer of money and responsibilities to our Department.

Children

6. **Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): What action the Government are taking to protect children and young people who are affected by domestic violence. [125468]

12. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): What steps the Government are taking to provide further support to the victims of domestic violence, with particular reference to children. [125476]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Miss Melanie Johnson): Local authority social services departments make a child and family assessment, undertaken according to the framework for the assessment of children in need and their families, and provide services in the light of the outcome of that assessment. Those services should be tailored to the individual needs, including protection needs, of the child, just as they should be for any child in need.

The Government are determined to prevent domestic violence happening or recurring, and to protect and support all victims of domestic violence. Their strategy for tackling domestic violence and for dealing with children who are victims is set out in the consultation paper, "Safety and Justice: The Government's Proposals on Domestic Violence", which was published in June.

Linda Gilroy: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for that reply. Perhaps she accepts that child contact is one of the most challenging issues that needs to be dealt with. Will she work with colleagues to ensure that, in the work of children's committees, children's safety is put first when domestic violence cases come before courts? Does she agree that what we most need to hear about in response to that consultation document, "Safety and Justice", is people's concerns and ideas on how we can improve our policies on that subject?

Miss Johnson: My hon. Friend makes some useful points about the focus in policy, which reflects the focus in the "Safety and Justice" paper. Guidelines have been produced for the courts and professionals on how to deal with child contact and domestic violence issues. Also, funding has been provided for child contact centres. We recognise the need to go on working with victims to make sure that they are put at the front of the issue, and to increase the legal protection available to them and their families.

Dr. Starkey: My question is directed primarily at the Minister for Children. What advice is given to local education authorities on children who have to move because their families are victims of domestic violence? What is the advice to local education authorities on maintaining educational continuity and, if necessary, providing transport, so that children can continue to go to the school that they attend, even if they have been forced to move in order to remove themselves from domestic violence?

The Minister for Children (Margaret Hodge): My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the fact that continuity for children in their schooling is crucial, particularly when they have experienced emotional upheaval as a result of domestic violence, separation and moving away from home. One of the advantages of the new department for children, young people and families will be that we can provide a more coherent and integrated response to children's needs, both through the education service and teachers and through the coming together of those people with others.

We announced the first 35 children's trusts last week. They will pool the previously separate budgets for education, social services and health at a local level, and I hope that they will also include services, such as Connexions and the youth offending teams. Bringing all those together will allow a more coherent response to the child's needs.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): First, I declare an interest as the patron of Brighton's women refuge. Proceedings today are slightly confusing, because a lot of questions seem to have dropped out and others are not based on those printed on the Order of Business.

I remind the Minister that three out of five children suffering from abuse have mothers who are experiencing domestic violence; that in nine out of 10 cases, children are present in the same or next room while violence is going on; and that children who have witnessed violence are more likely to be either abusers or victims themselves.

In the light of such statistics, schools are often best placed to detect incidences of abuse or violence in domestic scenarios. Indeed, the failure of schools to detect such abuse has been the basis of some of the worst cases of child death. What guidance is in place for a joined-up approach between teachers, school nurses and social workers to spot children who may be the victims of abuse, and to spot the mothers—in some cases, fathers—of those children, who may be subject to domestic violence but who have not presented themselves to the authorities? Women who are subject to domestic violence approach 11 different agencies, on average, before receiving the help that they need.

Margaret Hodge: The Education Act 2002 places a duty on education authorities to protect children at risk,

[Margaret Hodge]

including those at risk of witnessing or experiencing domestic violence. The hon. Gentleman will know that information sharing, which is central to minimising the risk of abuse or harm to young children, is the subject of a number of experiments being conducted by local government and funded by us. Information sharing will be critical. He will also accept that the proposals that arose from the inquiry into the tragic death of Victoria Climbié will strengthen some relationships at local level. I draw his attention to the development of children's funds, which will provide a more coherent, cross-professional response to children's needs, bringing in the education services and others.

Miss Johnson: The hon. Gentleman's made some useful points about the number of people with whom women have contact before they receive help. 30 per cent. of domestic violence starts during pregnancy. If abuse has started, it often intensifies during pregnancy. The recommendations of the latest confidential inquiry into maternal deaths, published by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in 2001, underline the importance of initiating work with pregnant women. In response, the Department of Health is funding a pilot of antenatal screening for domestic violence at the North Bristol NHS Trust, in which 80 community-based midwives were recruited in the hope of detecting abuse of women earlier in the domestic violence cycle and of providing more support and intervention at that stage.

Mr. Loughton: I am grateful that the new Minister for Children responded to my question. Will she confirm that she will be taking such matters under her wing in her new Ministry? Will she give more detail about how they will be approached in the Green Paper because, despite having a debate yesterday, we still have no answers. We received more answers to the questions that we asked yesterday by reading the leaked Government documents in *The Times* today.

The point about sharing information, which is crucial and about which I asked the Minister several questions yesterday, has not been answered. As the law stands, information sharing still cannot take place. Will she give a firm commitment to the House that that matter will be dealt with properly and in detail, when the Green Paper is eventually published, hopefully on the first day back in September?

Margaret Hodge: As the hon. Gentleman knows from last night's debate, we continue to implement all possible action that is necessary to improve information sharing. It is central to supporting better child protection practices throughout the country, particularly in local authority areas. In May we issued guidance to all relevant bodies to improve understanding of what information can be shared under human rights legislation. That guidance has already gone out and we shall be taking further steps. Pilots are being conducted on how information and computer technology can facilitate information sharing and flag up circumstances where children have come to the attention of different people or authorities in different circumstances. We need to see how those pilots work before deciding how best to implement them at national level.

The hon. Gentleman started by talking about the role of teachers. The Department for Education and Skills has introduced a number of initiatives in that regard. Under the healthy schools standard, we look for evidence that issues of child protection and domestic violence are covered. Under citizenship education, which we introduced, we look for information to be given. Before taking on our new responsibilities, we published an information pack for those who work with young people and in particular for teachers, so that they are more aware of what to consider and who to tell when they find evidence of abuse.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I apologise for being late, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness, which is an acute problem in London and the rest of the south-east because of the shortage of affordable accommodation. A series of support services is available for those who are placed in temporary accommodation and refuges, but only 15 per cent. of homeless families are placed in refuges. The others go into other forms of temporary accommodation, which are often far away from the communities from which they originate. How can we ensure that the support services available to families in other forms of temporary accommodation are as good as those in refuges?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Yvette Cooper): I can answer that question. My hon. Friend is right to say that people go into a variety of types of accommodation. To follow up the question asked by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), I can clarify that of those who were accepted as homeless and in priority need because of domestic violence, 15 per cent. went into refuges, 25 per cent. were staying with friends or relatives, 13 per cent. were in temporary council or housing association properties, 13 per cent. were in hostels and 6 per cent. were in bed-and-breakfast hotels.

My hon. Friend is right to say that the quality of the provision of additional support in women's refuges can be considerable. Obviously, the support available will be different in different types of accommodation, but the supporting people programme provides councils with £1.4 billion overall to pay for additional support for those with particular needs who are in supported accommodation. Of that, £34 million is spent in relation to domestic violence, which can include all sorts of support or the specialist additional support that is needed in other types of temporary accommodation. Local authorities can also provide different types of specialist support in different ways for those in various forms of accommodation.

I referred to the work being done in Harrow in London, which involves an innovative approach that includes providing help for people to stay in their own homes and other expert support for people in different types of accommodation. My hon. Friend is right—we must respond to the particular concerns or needs of an individual family and not expect one size or approach to suit all.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): The Minister will know that the best-laid plans often fail because of a

shortage of social workers and other professional staff, and the money to make necessary interventions to stop violence. What plans does she have to increase the number of social workers and the resources to pay for them? Will she tell us whether she intends specifically to target money for children who are victims of violence and live in refuges?

Margaret Hodge: We have already increased our investment in the social work force, but I accept the hon. Lady's point that there is a shortage of social workers. One of the key challenges faced by our new Department is how to encourage more people into social work, train them effectively and retain them. One of my ambitions is to raise the status of and value given to social workers in society and ensure that the esteem in which they are held marries with the difficult job that we ask of them.

We ran a national campaign to recruit more social workers. We invested more money and I am pleased to say that the number of people training to be social workers has gone up by 6.5 per cent. We are moving in the right direction, but that does not take away from the challenges that the hon. Lady knows that we face in our communities and throughout the work force. That is one of the central issues that I must tackle. Children who have witnessed or experienced domestic violence must be a priority group on whom we focus resources.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I pay tribute to the excellent work of the Rising Sun women's refuge in my constituency, which I was privileged to visit last month. We must get to the roots underlying domestic violence. The role of substance abuse, in particular of alcohol and drugs, in domestic violence is large. Whatever the difficulties in reporting the issues of the huge recorded increase in violence against women, including domestic violence, in this morning's press, the figures for substance abuse—for example the double digit increase in several categories of drug abuse—are absolutely undeniable. I suggest to Ministers that one way to tackle the scourge of domestic violence and child abuse early in the process is to identify drug addicts and alcoholics at a young age, and make many more places available for treatment.

Miss Johnson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making those points. They resonate with the current situation and the Government's work on drugs, including investment in, and a strategy of, identifying drug misuse early and ensuring that it is effectively dealt with, both through the courts and through providing support and treatment to help addicts get off drugs.

I also alert the hon. Gentleman to the alcohol harm reduction strategy. Work is being carried out by the Prime Minister's strategy unit and will soon be published. It will provide a strategy on alcohol harm in society, a question that is at least as serious as that of drugs.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I allowed the edges to be blurred slightly as we had time available. As we move on, I ask hon. Members to respect the content of the question as far as possible. Otherwise, I may be obliged to call them out of order.

Children (Parental Contacts)

8. **Ms Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley): If the Government will make a statement on measures in place to ensure incidents of domestic violence are considered when decisions are taken on arrangements for children having contact with parents. [125470]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. David Lammy): The Children Act 1989 ensures that the welfare of the child is paramount in all decisions on contact. Guidelines were issued in 2001 to ensure that incidents of domestic violence are considered when decisions on contact are taken. In addition, we will amend the contact and residency application forms to allow for details of domestic violence to be raised early on in the application process.

Ms Munn: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. However, like me, he will know that far too many children are killed during contact visits and mothers killed when an ex-partner comes to pick up a child for such a visit. Will my hon. Friend consider reviewing the guidelines and ensure that proper reviews take place into the deaths of children in such situations so that lessons can be learned and more robust procedures can be put in place? The deaths of young children and women in such situations must stop.

Mr. Lammy: I know that my hon. Friend has tremendous experience in this area. We are surveying the guidelines—the last survey was conducted at the end of 2002—and we hope to come forward with initial results shortly. The survey on the practical effect of the guidelines comes to an end in 2004, but we know that they have already had an effect on case law and a Court of Appeal decision. Furthermore, we want to see a multi-agency approach to the guidelines to ensure that the situations that my hon. Friend outlined in her question are avoided as far as possible.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I am most grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for drawing our attention to not blurring the edges of these important questions. I had hoped to put this point on Question 1, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons), because the issue of guidance to judges on child contact is important but fairly specific. The hon. Member for Rochdale may be able to catch your eye, as the issue has crept into other questions, which has the effect of blunting the impact of the focus that we must give it.

The Green Paper on domestic violence states that the guidelines issued to courts on parental contact are being reviewed, and we have just heard the Minister say that they are being surveyed and that amendments may follow at the end of the monitoring period. However, that is against the context of a 50 per cent. increase in the number of contact orders since 1999—a startling increase from 41,862 to 61,356 last year. The surveying process is taking place against a background of a huge number of extra contact orders being granted.

As a constituency case revealed to me only this week, appeals by the non-violent parent for supervision to be in place before the contact goes ahead still seem to go

[Mrs. Caroline Spelman]

unheeded. It is an incredible anomaly that a person convicted of a schedule 1 offence is not allowed to drive a school bus but can be granted unsupervised contact with the child that he or she has abused. This is a real issue of child protection: can we really afford to wait another year? What immediate action are the Government taking to protect children currently in such contact arrangements?

Mr. Lammy: The hon. Lady makes her points with some passion, because she is right—this is important. However, we issued guidelines, which are having an effect, and it is right for the Government and the agencies involved to draw empirical evidence on that effect. The hon. Lady will also know that it is for the courts to determine the contact arrangements for children, which they will want to ensure take place in a safe environment. The circumstances will depend on the particular case.

We issued the guidelines relatively recently and we must now see that they have an effect. Although I understand the urgency with which the hon. Lady makes the point, it is right that the Government should act sensibly and properly on the basis—

Mrs. Spelman: Slowly.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): Slowly.

Mr. Lammy: This is an important issue, on which we do not want to make partisan points. *[Interruption.]*

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): It is not a partisan point.

Mr. Lammy: I say to Opposition Members that it is this Government who have acted. *[Interruption.]*

Ms Shipley: I agree with the hon. Lady.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Spelman: Thank you for allowing me to respond, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The constituency case is urgent; it means that in 48 hours' time the mother will have to take the child to a centre with no supervision, to which circumstances the Government apparently have no answer. Since 1998, 15 children have been killed as a result of contact arrangements. That is quantifiable; it is a fact. A survey in 1999 found that 76 per cent. of children ordered by the courts to have contact with abusive or violent parents suffered in a variety of ways, ranging from physical and sexual abuse to neglect. Research undertaken by Christine Harrison of Warwick university shows that too often the views of the child who does not want to have contact with the violent or abusive parent are simply overridden. What assurance can the Minister for Children give that the wishes of the child in these contact arrangements will be given greater priority?

The Minister for Children (Margaret Hodge): My hon. Friend tried to give some assurance. The hon. Lady was correct to say that we need to increase the number of supervised contact centres. That is an urgent issue that we hope to address in the context of how we look at, and take forward, the work that has been done by Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services. We are already investing additional moneys; £2.5 million has gone in from the children's fund specifically to increase the number of supervised contact centres.

One of the advantages of the new organisation for which I now have responsibility is that we can start considering whether we can develop contact centres, for instance in some of the sure start centres and in other facilities that we provide for children, young people and families. *[Interruption.]* Indeed, if the hon. Lady will listen, I can tell her that I was at a meeting this morning at which we discussed what opportunity there would be in the new environment to get a coherence of services.

The hon. Lady raises an issue of huge importance and I draw her attention to the amendment in the Adoption and Children Act 2002. When consideration was taken of care and supervision orders, after the definition of "harm" in subsection (9) we inserted additional wording to include, for example, impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another. We now need to put in place the regulations to support that amendment to ensure that we act appropriately in circumstances of domestic violence.

Existing legislation should ensure that those taking decisions on behalf of children listen to the children's voice. I take very seriously the concern expressed by the hon. Lady that that is not sufficiently taken into account and I will take it on board in the work that I do in future.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise to you for missing a previous opportunity to speak by a smidgeon as I made the mistake of going in to the Public Gallery rather than the Members' Entrance. I am grateful to you for giving me a second opportunity to speak.

Following the vexed issue of contact orders in the review, is the Department prepared to countenance that the presumption should be changed? Currently, the presumption is that it is in the children's best interests to have contact. However, I contend that it is not and the deaths of children and mothers also suggest that it is not. First, are the Government prepared to change that presumption in law? Secondly, while the review is being carried out, could the guidance ensure that if it cannot be guaranteed that there will be supervised, safe contact, the presumption should be that there is no contact?

Mr. Lammy: My hon. Friend will know that debate on this issue is taking place not just in the United Kingdom, but in other parts of the world. In New Zealand, for example, the authorities make the presumption that my hon. Friend desires. However, the Children Act 1989 is the law in the UK and is based on the best interests of the child. The groups operating in this area take different sides in the debate, some wanting the presumption to be that there is no contact, and others wanting to ensure that there is contact. We will continue to listen to those points of view, but the evidence suggests that, wherever possible, contact with both parents is important and necessary, and supports

the emotional development of the child. I accept that it is a difficult area, but that is the Government's current position on the matter.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I have to take issue with the Minister about his earlier reply. He claimed that the Government guidelines that were introduced in April 2001 were having an effect, but they are not. In 2001 only 713 contact orders were refused, and that number had decreased to 518 in 2002. I am therefore not sure where and in what way the guidelines are having an effect, and I would be grateful if the Minister could clarify that. In a wider context, the Association of Chief Officers of Probation estimated that domestic violence is involved in 16,000 cases annually in which a court welfare report is ordered. Do the Government therefore believe it to be right that contact is refused in only 518 of those cases?

Mr. Lammy: As I said, it is right that we act on the basis of the evidence put forward. The hon. Lady makes a relevant point. We will examine the matter and consider the analysis to see how we are progressing. It is also right that we invest extra funds in contact centres and work with the national association to ensure that standards and provision are improved, and that we can look forward to a better future.

The hon. Lady will also know that the development of contact centres occurred in the 1980s. We only reached a significant point in 1988, when the association was set up. She is right to say that the issue is urgent. The Government take it seriously: I hope that those extra funds are beginning to have an effect, and I accept the hon. Lady's point about considering the guidance quickly.

Margaret Hodge: I simply wish to add that all hon. Members recognise how difficult those judgments are for those who have to make them. On the one hand there are all the negative aspects arising from children having witnessed abuse or having been victims of abuse by the parent seeking contact, but on the other hand we know that maintaining contact with both parents is an important way of providing the best opportunity for a child to grow up healthy and well. Those two aspects must be balanced, and the answer must be in constant updating of the training of those who have to take those difficult decisions and, as the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) said, in emphasising the voice of the child in informing the decisions. I hope that no one goes away from this afternoon's discussions believing that these issues are simple and easy to resolve.

Police Powers

10. **Huw Irranca-Davies** (Ogmore): What steps the Government are taking to give the police new powers to tackle domestic violence and bring more offenders to justice; and if the Government will make a statement. [125474]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Yvette Cooper): The "Safety and Justice" consultation paper includes proposals to make common assault an arrestable offence, to criminalise the breach of civil orders and to extend the availability of restraining orders.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I thank the Minister for that response and welcome the extension of police powers. Tough measures are essential in this area and I believe that we will all welcome that extension.

Will the Minister and the Minister for Children recognise that using tough measures alone is like using a one-pronged fork—not highly effective? We need to add other forms of attack, one of which should be raising awareness among children, schoolteachers and parents. Will the Minister and her ministerial colleagues ensure that, in the same way that police powers have been extended, we also make available effective resources for groups such as the Bridgend domestic abuse forum and others throughout the country that do such good work in this area?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right. Clearly, the issue is not simply one of addressing and providing justice when domestic violence arises. It must also be a case of preventing domestic violence in the first place. That is why the consultation paper is divided into proposals, first, on improving prevention and, as my hon. Friend suggested, education; secondly, on greater protection and justice for victims of domestic violence; and thirdly, on support so that people can rebuild their lives.

My hon. Friend is right to say that the proposals need to be balanced. That balance is why the proposals in the consultation paper have been so widely welcomed by those working in domestic violence throughout the country. I pay tribute to the work of my right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General in that regard.

Murder (Domestic Disputes)

11. **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): What proportion of the victims of murder were killed as a result of domestic disputes involving their spouse or partner in each of the last five years. [125475]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. David Lammy): Homicide figures for all victims where the principal suspect was a partner or an ex-partner were: in 1997–98, 21 per cent.; 1998–99, 16 per cent.; 1999–2000, 16 per cent.; 2000–01, 16 per cent.; and, 2001–02, 18 per cent.

Mr. Rendel: In view of the number of murders that are committed by one partner against another, does the Minister agree that it is tremendously important to maintain secrecy about the new details and, in particular, the new address of any family fleeing from violence? Will he make representations to the Lord Chancellor's Department following the case of one of my constituents who was involved in domestic violence? She wrote to me about the court case and said that the medical report compiled by the consultant paediatrician contained all their new details and secret address and was forwarded to her former husband. Does the

[Mr. Rendel]

Minister agree that that is outrageous and that it would be a good idea to make representations to the Lord Chancellor to ensure that it does not happen again?

Mr. Lammy: I certainly undertake, through the Lord Chancellor, to look into that case. General lessons may well be drawn from what happened.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Has any assessment been made of the percentage of cases of murder as a result of domestic violence that involve asylum seekers? Many asylum seekers suffer stress because of their situation and the trauma that they may have gone through. Has any assessment been made of the effect that that might have?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a precise answer, but I will find out and ensure that he is informed. I can tell the House that another proposal in "Safety and Justice" is for multi-agency reviews whenever there is a homicide resulting from domestic violence so that all agencies operating at local level—the police, local authorities and so on—can learn lessons from that horrendous event to ensure that as far as possible action is taken to prevent such events happening again.

Mr. Lammy: In the last five years for which figures are available, 499 suspects were indicted for killing their partner or ex-partner, of which 443—89 per cent.—were convicted of homicide.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): Will one of the ministerial team comment on the role of male perpetrator programmes in getting to the root of the problem?

Paul Goggins: I do not know whether I am the most qualified to answer that question. We are analysing a number of programmes operating in, for example, north America. If we find that they are successful, we will implement them. We think that it is possible to run some of those programmes and for them to have a positive impact. Where possible, we will of course try to implement that approach.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): We do not have to look so far afield for help with those perpetrator programmes. I commend to the Minister a project by Probation West Midlands, which recognises the fundamental injustice in domestic violence. So often, it is the victim who must move out of the family home, with the loss of the security and assets that go with it, while the perpetrator can remain there. Recognising that fundamental injustice, Probation West Midlands has made provision in its probation hostels to remove the perpetrator and to start on the probation programme. Is that not something that, without having to cross the Atlantic, we might investigate in a little more depth and roll out with more effect?

Paul Goggins: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her advice and I will certainly find out more about that scheme and other programmes. The point that she makes about the victim being forced to move out is important. It is one area, which again concerns safety and justice, on which we are consulting. Wherever possible the victim should remain at home within familiar surroundings and the perpetrator should be removed.

With reference to a previous answer, we want to ensure that, where people are identified as perpetrators, we have a pro-arrest approach. We are ensuring that common assault is an arrestable offence, so that perpetrators are arrested and removed and victims can remain in safety in their homes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are still at an experimental stage with cross-cutting questions and not everyone has settled down and got it right, whether they are Back Benchers putting questions or officials advising Ministers on answers. It is a matter of finding the subjects that lend themselves most to these debates and then all Members will understand the type of question intended to cut across from one Department to another.

As I have said before, I hope that hon. Members will write to me with their comments on the debates. We have had five altogether, on different subjects, and we must consider what are the best subjects and put them on a regular rotational basis so that the debates work more smoothly. I have tried to bring in more informality, with follow-up questions from both sides, but within the scope of an hour that is often difficult to do. We were assisted today by pure chance, as some of the questions were withdrawn at the last minute. I thank everyone for entering in the spirit of the debate. It has been a useful innovation and we can hone it and make it an effective procedure.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have just answered most of the questions that I intended to ask, but bearing in mind that the recess is coming up I am keen to learn about cross-cutting questions. Can you point out where I can find the information in writing, so that I can mug up on them during the recess and we can finally hone the debates? Or do we have a situation rather like those adverts on TV, where cross-cutting questions build week by week into exciting new parliamentary procedure?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Modesty forbids, but I made a lengthy statement at the beginning of the first debate, so the hon. Gentleman may find it useful to consult *Hansard* to see what I said.

3.28 pm

Sitting suspended.

Financing Development

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

3.30 pm

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Hilary Benn): The latest human development report was published last week. It states

"The Millennium Development Goals present the world with daunting challenges. Unless there is radical improvement, too many countries will miss the targets—with disastrous consequences for the poorest and the most vulnerable of their citizens. Yet today the world has an unprecedented opportunity to deliver on the commitment to eradicating poverty. For the first time there is genuine consensus among rich and poor countries that poverty is the world's problem. And it is together that the world must fight it."

Poverty is indeed the world's problem.

Today's debate takes place on the last parliamentary day before the recess. Only a small number of hon. Members are present, but they have the ability to contribute to this important discussion. I want to take the opportunity to reflect on where developed and developing countries have come from in trying to do something about the problem and what we have yet to do if we are to achieve the millennium development goals. The response of the rich world to the task of development—in essence the answer to the question, "What can we do to help poor people in poor countries?"—has evolved substantially in the past 30 years as we have come better to understand what works and what does not.

For example, we have realised that the 1970s ethos of funding big capital infrastructure projects is not enough to kick-start developing countries' economies to reduce poverty. The focus on technical assistance projects, which were a feature of the 1980s and 1990s, to build capacity in developing countries is also not the sole answer, because the limitations of the project approach to development have become clear. In the cases of health and education—this is true of other public services—long-term, recurrent funding is needed for teachers, books, doctors, nurses and drugs. By their very nature, projects are not always designed to address such long-term needs.

We have learned that conflict kills development as well as killing people. Conflict is the ultimate failure of governance. We appreciate the importance of sound policies and the right environment for development prospects. We have come better to understand—we have debated the issue in both this Chamber and the House—that if the world trading system is unfair, it is more difficult for countries to share in global prosperity and therefore to fund development. We have developed, particularly in the past five years, a broad consensus that development agencies must work more closely to support poverty reduction strategies, which should be led by developing countries themselves. In other words, we must back the judgment of the Governments of developing countries as they take their countries forward.

We have seen the emergence of global initiatives supported through funds, which can help to bring effort, enthusiasm and money. However, such initiatives must support country-led development efforts rather than making them more difficult. For the first time, we have a clear international consensus on what we want to achieve in the form of the millennium development goals, which were agreed at the millennium summit in 2000. Those goals will measure our progress towards eliminating poverty and improving the well-being and life chances of the world's poorest people.

The human development report, which was published the week before last, makes it clear that without rapid progress the MDGs will not be met, which means that developed nations must provide a higher volume of government assistance and that the assistance we provide must be more effective. We need to do more on debt relief. We must do more to integrate developing countries into the world trading system.

We have made some progress. It is important that we acknowledge that, not least because it shows that progress is possible, and that is needed to encourage us to do more. As a result of last year's spending review, the UK's official development assistance will increase by £1.5 billion to reach 0.4 per cent. of national income by 2005–06. That is the biggest ever rise in UK aid: a 93 per cent. real-terms increase since 1997 after a generation in which UK aid fell as a proportion of national wealth.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. Several countries have also taken the step of setting a date when they would reach the target of 0.7 per cent. of gross domestic product devoted to aid. Is that something that the Government are considering?

Hilary Benn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for asking that question. The Government remain committed to achieving the 0.7 per cent. target. The process by which we reach it is determined by successive spending reviews and we have a commitment to reach the 0.4 per cent. figure to which I referred a moment ago. That compares with the 0.26 per cent. figure that we inherited when we came into government in 1997. The important thing is that we move in the right direction and we need to make further progress. I acknowledge that point and I look forward to having the opportunity to make that progress. As a result of that increase in UK aid expenditure, we will be able by 2006 to talk about a £1 billion bilateral programme for Africa, which is the continent in which we need to make the biggest progress if we are to have any prospect of meeting millennium development goals.

The second change that we have made to improve the effectiveness of our aid spending has been to untie 100 per cent. of our aid. By 2006, 90 per cent. of the bilateral spending of the Department for International Development will be focused on low-income countries where it can be most effective. We are pressing other donors, including the multilateral institutions, to direct their aid in line with best practice.

There has also been progress internationally. Last year in Monterrey, and then in Johannesburg, the international community announced the first increase in official development aid for 20 years, with $12 billion a year of extra funding pledged by 2006. Members of the European Union are set to increase the average proportion of gross national income given to 0.39 per cent. by 2006. However, in respect of EU development

[Hilary Benn]

spending, we are all working hard to increase the proportion of European Community overseas development assistance that goes to low-income countries. That figure stood at only 38 per cent. in 2000 and it rose to 44 per cent. in 2001. We are waiting for the figures for 2002—the early indications are that it will increase again, but we still have a long way to go.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): While we are on the subject of EU aid, will the Minister tell us whether any progress has been made in the targeting of EU aid towards the poorest countries? Does he think that that process has become more efficient, so that the money is processed more quickly allowing projects to go ahead?

Hilary Benn: On the first point, the figure of 38 per cent., which was the low point of focus on low-income countries, has increased to 44 per cent. We hope that there will be a further increase when the figures for 2002 are published, but that is a long way from the objective that we have set, which is a target of 70 per cent. We need to continue to have that argument with our European colleagues because it is right and proper that we should channel European resources to the countries where we can make the biggest difference in relieving poverty.

On the hon. Lady's second question, the honest answer is that some progress has been made but there is still some way to go. The process of "deconcentration", as it is described in European parlance, is devolution of responsibility for programmes from Brussels to in-country, which reflects very much the process that DFID has been going through. One would hope that decisions taken on the ground would lead to better outcomes than decisions taken from afar. However, we must maintain our interest in the process because a significant proportion of our aid budget is channelled through the European Union.

The heavily indebted poor countries initiative has been a success, both in delivering relief and in ensuring that relief is channelled to poverty reduction. To date, it has resulted in $60 billion worth of debt relief, although we need to provide additional relief for countries as they exit HIPC if their debt continues to be unsustainable due to external factors beyond their control. We must make progress on trade, which is crucial to achieving the millennium development goals, particularly in agriculture, as three quarters of the world's poor live in rural areas.

At Doha, the international community said that it intended to put development at the heart of world trade negotiations. We are putting a great deal of effort into trying to get that right, but progress has been too slow. When we meet in Cancun in September, the responsibility for progress will clearly lie on the developed countries, which are the main perpetrators of an unfair trading system. The EU's package of common agricultural policy reforms is a first step towards making global agricultural trade fairer. We now look to others to make similar moves as we approach the Cancun negotiations.

Having said all that, the report of the high-level panel on financing for development, which is chaired by Ernesto Zedillo, estimated that at least $50 billion more in aid would be required every year to achieve the millennium goals. As a matter of urgency, we must look at ways in which the benefits of existing and future aid pledges can be maximised.

All the things that I have described are important in supporting and encouraging development. Aid makes an important contribution. For example, it has contributed to a doubling of school enrolments and a halving of infant mortality since 1970. That goes back to the point that I made earlier about progress. Recent successes in Africa show that high aid levels can provide major returns: Uganda received more than 20 per cent. of its GDP in aid in the early 1990s and has achieved decade-long growth rates of more than 7 per cent. and reduced the proportion of people living below the poverty line by more than 20 per cent.

Of course, it is equally true that there have been cases where aid has been badly used, on occasion supporting corrupt regimes or wasted on misconceived projects, but countries with fair and transparent policies have a greater ability to use aid funds effectively and make good use of additional aid.

There are several ideas in the international system about ways in which we might increase the amount of aid, which we must do if we are to make progress towards the millennium development goals by 2015. One example is the Tobin tax, which is an interesting idea. Unfortunately, without universal support it would not work. Another idea is the resumption of general special drawing rights allocations, with developed countries giving their share to developing countries, but there are difficulties with that proposal as well.

Earlier, I mentioned the 0.7 per cent. target. Although most donor countries are committed to reaching 0.7 per cent. in the long term, the global level at present is only 0.2 per cent. If we are to make progress towards the targets, we cannot wait for all countries to achieve 0.7 per cent. We must increase the amount of aid now.

Dr. Tonge: The Minister swiftly moved off the subject of the Tobin tax. We are always told that it will not work unless it is applied universally. Can he tell us whether international bankers and the International Monetary Fund—or whoever must be involved—are actually talking about it? Is there any possibility that it will ever happen?

Hilary Benn: I am not sure that I can answer the hon. Lady's last question about whether the Tobin tax will ever happen. My assessment is the one that I have just given: it is an interesting idea that dates back quite a long time, as the hon. Lady knows. It has been dusted down in the context of the debate about the need for additional aid, but in theory it relies for its success on everyone signing up to its operation, and an assessment of the debate thus far would show that we are not in that position. That is why I pointed out that it is unlikely to offer a solution to the problem that we are debating this afternoon, as it would not work unless everybody signed up.

Mr. Love: On a recent visit to the United Nations, about a month and a half ago, the delegation from Parliament met the director of the economic and

development section. I put the question whether the Tobin tax was a realistic proposal and he definitely rejected that as the way forward.

Hilary Benn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information. It reinforces my point; we need to focus our efforts and attention on the things that are on the table that might enable us to increase the amount of aid available. That brings me to the idea, launched by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, of the international finance facility. The facility is designed to try to achieve the millennium development goals by doubling aid for the world's poorest countries from $50 billion a year today to $100 billion a year in the years up to 2015, or in other words to meet the gap identified by Zedillo. It would do that by delivering resources up front over the next few years when they will have most impact on achieving the targets. On the basis of long-term, binding donor commitments from the richest countries, some of which have already been made, the facility would be able to lever in additional money from the international capital markets to double, in effect, the development aid. In other words, the international finance facility is intended to bridge the gap in development financing between the resources that have already been pledged and the additional funds that are now recognised as urgently needed to meet the MDGs.

Of course, we have a responsibility to ensure that development money will be used effectively, and under the proposal the developed world would make a commitment to provide long-term, untied and effective aid as investment to the countries that need it most. We see the facility as an integral part of a new agreement between developed and developing countries, with each country tackling corruption, promoting stability and agreeing the necessary transparency in economic and corporate policies to achieve that goal; we see it, too, as part of the country-owned poverty reduction strategies, involving agreement of clear and costed plans for education, health and economic capacity, so that development aid can be seen not as compensation for past failures but as investment in future prosperity and success.

For our part, we must continue our efforts with other donor partners to ensure that aid is used for poverty reduction, that it is not tied to contracts using suppliers from the donor country and that it is provided in predictable amounts so that Governments can make plans on the basis of receiving that aid. In the case of the international finance facility, it would need to be disbursed to a range of recipient countries so that no more than 5 per cent. of the total amount of finance raised through the international finance facility would go to any one country. Of course, aid would be targeted at low-income countries.

The concept of the international finance facility offers a number of advantages. It focuses on the finance necessary to help achieve the MDGs. It is founded on developed countries' long-term commitments to the countries that are striving to achieve those goals. It would bridge the gap by leveraging the long-term commitments, enabling us to move more quickly towards the target, which each donor country could achieve by contributing 0.7 per cent. of gross domestic product in development aid. One would not have to wait for the 0.7 per cent. because we could increase the value of aid that people are prepared to give, and of course the international finance facility could deploy a large amount of aid over the next few years, when it would have most impact.

At the Evian summit last month, Heads of State called for a report on the international finance facility for September. We are now working with French colleagues on that, looking closely at the question of commitments against needs, finalising an in-depth analysis on the case for bringing aid forward and some of the technical and financial aspects of the proposal that still need to be worked through. One of the most encouraging points to emerge from all the discussions on the idea of the international finance facility in past months is that there is a general acceptance—this takes us back to the point about interest in ideas that can make a difference—of the need to examine the proposal. Everybody recognises the need to make progress, not least in the poorest countries, which have expressed their support, because it provides an opportunity to take a significant step towards meeting the millennium development goals. We must not miss that opportunity for the simple reason that the human development report reminds us that time is extremely short, and that a great many people depend on us.

3.50 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): This is a very intimate little debate—almost a private audience with the Minister. We thank him for spending time with us this afternoon when he has other things to do. It is a useful opportunity to have this private audience with the Minister, because I need to get a few things out of my head before the recess and to ask some questions. It will not be a long speech, but it will be reflective and hopefully the Minister will respond at the end. I am not clear how we are going to do this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order. With permission, the Minister may wind up the debate.

Dr. Tonge: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Minister mentioned the millennium development goals and suggested that progress had been made on them. I was extremely depressed by the departmental report, as I am sure was the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman). On page 72 in particular, there are graphs showing the total lack of progress towards millennium development goals in sub-Saharan Africa. It is, indeed, a depressing picture. When we talk about progress, we must always allow for middle-income countries such as Indonesia and India that may be making some progress, but in Africa we have a serious problem, which is worsening. That needs to be emphasised over and over again.

I will start with the international finance facility because I am an old cynic. I appreciate that developed countries all over the world should give 0.7 per cent. of their gross national product and I agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) that we should set a date by which we are to achieve that. We should all tighten up that target. We talk about millennium goals, so let us get on with it and have a goal for when we will achieve that 0.7 per cent. worldwide.

Something like the international finance facility is introduced, everyone agrees that it is a great idea. I do not totally understand the high finance of it, but I

[Dr. Tonge]

understand that donor Governments will give money to the finance facility, which will then issue bonds to developing countries, which in some magical way will be worth more than just giving them the money. I am prepared to accept that on trust. What worries me is not the mechanics of the facility, but whether developed donor countries will actually give the money in the first place. We do have that problem. The global health fund was a similar initiative in which donor countries contributed to the fund, but there is a shortfall. The second payment, which is due soon, is not yet fully funded.

The financial wizardry to get the money to developing countries may be ingenious, but that is no help if we do not get it in the first place. That is my great concern. Another such example is the pledges that were made at Tokyo to reconstruct Afghanistan and how slow that money was to come in. Afghanistan is still struggling to come out of the terrible conflict and poverty that it was in. It is all very well having such schemes, but they all boil down to the fact that donor Governments have to cough up the money in the first place. I am extremely sceptical about that.

Mr. Love: I suspect that everyone in the Chamber has some sympathy for the hon. Lady's argument, but surely the other side of that argument is that any additional pressures that can be brought to bear on the needs of Africa and other less well-developed countries through an international finance facility would increase the overall amount of aid given by the first world, which has been reluctant to increase its overall aid to the 0.7 per cent. target, as she said.

Dr. Tonge: Of course I agree that any initiative is worth while. I have been my party's international development spokesman for six years and was the first to congratulate the Government on what they have done about debt relief and progressing towards development goals. There is no question about that; I simply question the ability of donor Governments to provide the finance that is needed.

There is also some sleight of hand in what is happening. We hear that we have made progress on debt relief and that a global health fund has been set up. We are to have an international finance facility. Such news is always sold to us as if it is a new initiative, but everything is within the 0.4 per cent. of gross national product—I think that that is the figure that the Government are aiming at—that we donate as international aid. Nevertheless, it is of course welcome.

I want to talk about the lack of progress in trade reforms—the fiddling around at the edges, with talk about new issues and attendance at the Cancun talks. For goodness'sake, when will we do something about American agricultural subsidies and the common agricultural policy? Nothing would make more difference to poverty, particularly in some African countries, than doing something about the west's subsidies and protectionist regimes. Attention is always diverted. We talk about other issues and other things that need to be done. We must return to the basic problem that subsidies given to very rich countries for their produce, and the west's barriers against developing countries' exports, are one of the chief problems for developing countries. Wherever I have been in the world in the past couple of years, people have said, "Trade, not aid." Yes, they like the aid, but they need trade—a way of making their own living. I urge the Minister to put that issue at the top of his agenda.

What I am now going to say, briefly, is almost heresy. I shall talk about foreign investment in developing countries. We are all constantly bombarded—by the anti-globalisation movements and people who think that multinational companies are the wickedest things ever to have walked the face of the earth—with the idea that we must constantly campaign against private investment and privatisation of anything in developing countries. We need to rethink. People who campaign against multinational companies also need to rethink what they are saying.

I am not an economist or a historian, and the comparison that I want to make is probably not a good one, but back in the 19th century in Britain people were very poor; they suffered from poor health and there was little education. Where did health care and education come from? It came from big business, which made money for this country—by whatever means and I accept that that is an issue. Eventually, philanthropists emerged from many big businesses and decided that they had to do something about the state of the work force: they had to improve health care and education. That is how we became healthy, rich and powerful.

Yet we expect developing countries to concentrate on health and education before they have been through the stages that we went through in Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries. We are somehow making them do it the wrong way round and rightly so, because we feel guilty when people say that this country became rich on the backs of developing countries and therefore we should be making their progress much faster. We must bear in mind that it was big business and big businessmen who helped this country to reach the position that it is in now.

I want the Government to take a hard look at multinationals and how they operate in developing countries. When I first took over this portfolio, there were campaigns about Shell, Rio Tinto, Nestlé, and the big drug companies and how wicked they were. All those companies are now getting a social conscience. At the very least, they are producing nice, glossy brochures that tell us all about their education schemes, health schemes and what they are doing for their workers in countries where they extract minerals or whatever they do. At least they are producing brochures. They did not do that 10 years ago.

The hon. Member for Meriden and I heard about the African Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Partnerships, or ACHAP, scheme in Botswana—I sent the Minister details about it and I do hope that he received them—where big business in the shape of Merck, Sharp and Dohme, a charity and a non-governmental organisation in the shape of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, if one can call Bill Gates such a thing, and the Botswana Government are getting together to deal with the AIDS crisis in Botswana. How many more of those schemes can we cook up? There must be many schemes on many fronts through which we can harness the power of multinational companies and enable them to see that they will benefit, become richer and have a better work

force by improving the health and the education of the countries in which they operate. The scheme was developed in Botswana because it is losing so many skilled people, who are dying as a result of the AIDS epidemic and it cannot afford to keep training new staff. Big business has seen that it is worth while investing in health care and in the prevention of AIDS. I hope that the Minister can deal with that question, however difficult it is.

Before we leave the subject, I must point out that all sorts of initiatives are needed to encourage transparency in big business. As we heard, there is a movement towards that, so that concessions given to developing countries by multinationals working in them will be made transparent. We also know that those multinational companies have huge management expertise, so if they are in some sort of partnership with the Government of the country in which they work, they can help with management expertise and capacity building.

I also make another plea for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development guidelines, about which we hear so much, to be made more legally binding and for them not simply to be a voluntary code. I would also occasionally like to see a few investigations into and prosecutions of companies that have broken those guidelines. There is a mechanism for that to happen. I have inquired about it, but no cases are ever brought. It is time that they were.

Please let us embrace globalisation and multinational companies, if it is possible to do so. Let us also try to bring their huge profits and resources into the development of the poorest countries, instead of casting them mentally out into the wilderness as wicked things about which we do not want to know.

I have "AIDS" written on my notes, but I do not believe that we need to have a debate about AIDS on this occasion. We all know that it is one of the greatest problems faced in development, particularly in Africa. I add to that the problem of malaria, which is a poor sister but is still probably the biggest killer. I recently met people from a non-governmental organisation called Medicines for Malaria Venture, which sounds very much like the international AIDS vaccine initiative about which we have all heard so much. Again, the idea is to try to harness the drug companies and the research facilities to do something about malaria in the same way that the AIDS vaccine initiative is doing something about the AIDS epidemic. The problem is not a priority for the developed world: nobody dies of malaria here unless they have been abroad and not taken the right precautions. However, malaria is a huge killer in the third world, and it is another issue that needs to be addressed.

There has been progress on debt relief, although there needs to be much more and I ask the Minister in passing whether there have been any more thoughts on Iraq's situation. Iraq's development and progress will be stopped if it has to start paying back all the huge debts that it owes. That debt can be classified as odious debt—I hope that most people would say that Saddam Hussein was an odious person.

Before I sit down I shall make two other points. I would love to know how much progress is being made on micro-credit—I have saved up the annual report for the summer recess, because I have not read it properly and in detail yet. I am interested in micro-credit, which is a form of financing for development that helps the very poorest people at the grass roots, as does what I call alternative technology. When we go abroad we all see wonderful schemes involving treadle pumps—water pumps operated by children running round roundabouts—and other examples of small technology, as opposed to huge hydroelectric schemes.

The Grameen bank harnessed micro-credit and made it much more widespread, so is there any way that such simple technology, which is the obvious answer in many places throughout the third world, can be similarly harnessed and taken over by a multinational company or organisation? That way, when the hon. Member for Meriden and I go abroad, instead of seeing one or two dinky little pumps working in a remote village somewhere in Africa, we could say, "Yes, there are millions of these all over Africa, providing the clean water that people need."

Finally, every time I speak in a debate on financing development I make the same plea. I am still in total and utter confusion about the various lines of development funding and I came across another one the other day called the African and Asian development performance funds, under which it seems that money is made available for good performance—like foundation third-world countries. If such countries do well and get three stars, they become foundation developing countries and, apparently, get extra money from those funds. I would love the Department for International Development to say how many lines of funding there are and how they interlink.

4.8 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I am sorry in a way, because this is an unprecedented occasion for me—I do not think that I have ever been in Westminster Hall for a debate in which there are only three speeches from Front Benchers. Perhaps it is just as well that the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) has gone. All that I would say to the Government is that timetabling a debate on such an important subject on the very last afternoon of term will create difficulties for hon. Members who perhaps feel the call of the recess very strongly. However, what we lack in quantity, we shall endeavour to make up for in quality this afternoon.

Hilary Benn: In my defence, when the debate was scheduled, we were all confident that we would still be here contemplating messages from the other place.

Mrs. Spelman: In the end, I suppose that the allocation of time usually rests in the hands of what are euphemistically known as the usual channels. However, given the importance of the subject, I am sorry that it has been left right until the end of term.

I cannot disguise the fact that I come to our debate about financing development with a heavy heart. I spent the morning dealing with the tragic issue of the execution of street children in Latin America. When one analyses the underlying causes, one finds all too often that, as with so many shocking humanitarian problems, it is abject poverty that gives rise to such misery. We therefore supported the Government in giving the

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Department's work a poverty reduction focus in the International Development Act 2002. None the less, the fact that the UN estimates that there are approximately 1 million street children in the world demonstrates that the Government should attach greater priority to the issue.

The Department spent £2.4 million on producing a report about street children, but that has so far made no appreciable difference to the security of such children. I hope that the Government's budgetary support to affected countries will eventually trickle down, as the Government hope that it will, so that children can be safer on the streets. So far, however, there is little evidence that that approach to the problem is working.

No one who has spoken in the debate—there are only three of us—is under any illusion about the fact that the lack of finance for development is one of the main reasons why countries are held back. I hope, therefore, that our debate, on this sultry July afternoon, on the last day of the parliamentary term, is not simply intended to give the Government a platform from which to re-announce the benefits of the international financing facility. I have some reservations about that measure, which have been articulated by the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), and I shall return to them.

The fact is that the developing world is a long way off obtaining the finance that it needs. The announcement of the international finance facility was welcomed by the Conservative party, but it will remain only an idea unless other countries contribute. It is gratifying to hear that France is co-operating with us again and considering the proposal, which would allow the poorest countries of the world to attract private investment. However, when the Prime Minister introduced it to other world leaders at the G8 summit in Evian, it was greeted with scepticism by, among others, the United States and Germany.

The Government might say that simply getting the issue on the agenda was an achievement, and that much is perhaps true, given the amount of bad blood between those countries following the war in Iraq. However, to echo the words of the director of the Save the Children Fund:

> "Everything depends on securing real commitment from G7 countries that is translated into a concrete plan of action."

We wish the Government success in getting other countries to co-operate and, most importantly, to contribute. That must happen if the idea is to fly.

Development assistance suffers particularly from the political pitfall of unfulfilled pledges. Yesterday, I had a visit from Nirj Deva, the Conservative spokesman on international development in the European Parliament. He showed me what was, I suppose, a league table of donors' performance on the pledges that they made in Tokyo to help with the reconstruction of Afghanistan. It is significant that the hon. Member for Richmond Park and I should both alight on how the world's richest nations have delivered on their pledges to help one of the world's poorest nations. To take one of the most startling examples of underperformance, only $35 million of the $500 million pledged by the Arab Development Bank has been forthcoming. Another example of rich donors' failure to deliver on their promises is the fact that only a fraction of the more than $900 million that was pledged at the last donor round-table for Burundi has been delivered. That is indicative of an underlying problem, and we cannot skate away from it if we are to talk about financing development.

Progress towards achieving the millennium development goals is being held back by a lack of finance. The World Bank estimated that an additional $40 billion to $60 billion is needed to fulfil the millennium development goals. That is over and above the current contribution of $57 billion, so it is effectively calling for a doubling in funding for the goals to be achieved. That probably led to the Government hitting on the idea of the international finance facility, but without the political will, there will be no guarantees.

There are steps that the Government can take to amend and improve existing financial measures, even while we live in hope that the international finance facility comes to something. The hon. Member for Richmond Park mentioned debt relief, and there is no room for complacency. Compared with the high expectation in the millennium year of how many countries would be relieved of their debts, the fact is that—unless the total has gone up—only eight countries have successfully completed the process.

There are problems with the process. It is too slow, complicated and secretive, which does not help the relationship between poor and rich nations. As I have said before, the sustainability index on which the debt relief process is based needs to be reworked. It does not cope with exogenous shocks to economies, which so many countries have faced recently. When we look to relieve a country of its debts, we try to put it on a sustainable footing, but the sustainability calculation is heavily dependent on the country's export earnings, and nothing in the formula takes into account, for example, the recent collapse in commodity prices.

I also remain sceptical about how well relieved even those eight countries are. We can take a snapshot and say that we have relieved the developing countries of their debts, based on a sustainability index and their export earnings two or three years ago, but the question is whether they are sustainable today. I remain worried about the rigidity of the sustainability calculation.

AIDS has an enormous impact on the capacity of the poorest countries to achieve sustainability. I have said that before, but I am not aware that anything has been done. With AIDS infection rates as high as 40 per cent. in Botswana and at an average of 25 per cent. of the population in sub-Saharan Africa, how sustainable will those economies be in future? We know that the disease is taking out the most economically active members of society—those who will contribute the most to their country's economic growth—but nothing in the debt relief formula takes into account the impact of HIV/AIDS. That weakness in the calculation worries me, as does the morality of recovering debts from nations with such high rates of HIV/AIDS infection. The primary call on much of their resources must be on treating the sick and dying, trying to sustain life and achieving sustainability. I have deep concerns about the situation.

The hon. Lady spoke about the serious implications of the current world trade negotiations, and when we talk about financing for development, we cannot scuttle away from that issue. Progress on the Doha round has

been deeply disappointing. We had a separate debate specifically on it, and I remain deeply concerned that the much-trumpeted CAP reform deal has failed to deliver what would most help the developing world and particularly sub-Saharan Africa: the removal of agricultural subsidies that make it impossible for the poorest countries to compete on a level playing field with the developed world.

It has been said, rightly, that Europe and America are equal offenders, but it is not satisfactory for us to blame each other as being equally guilty and then do nothing about it. I found it quite encouraging that President Chirac initially led the way by saying that he would support the cancellation of export subsidies in relation to sub-Saharan Africa, but he has withdrawn from that lead on the CAP reform deal, so it has not happened. I urge the Minister to use our recovering relations with France to revisit that proposal, because our two nations, with their long history of involvement in sub-Saharan Africa, may understand better than many others what a difference it would make to that whole continent if we reformed our agricultural subsidies.

Dr. Tonge: Does the hon. Lady think that if Britain had vigorously supported the offer made by the French to drop EU subsidies in relation to African countries, it might have made more progress?

Mrs. Spelman: We all know how the voting system works in the European context, but if two of the largest voting nations put their weight behind such a proposal, they would at least form a blocking minority. That would have significant weight, and it would have had a real impact on the outcome of those CAP reform negotiations.

The matter that I cannot fathom from the Government's explanation of what happened during those negotiations relates to the fact that the industry—our farmers—is willing to move on that issue. The CAP was intended to provide our farmers with a reasonable income, but it no longer serves them as it was intended to do. We all know that, these days, farmers do not have reasonable levels of income; otherwise, they would not be leaving the industry. Because the CAP no longer serves our farmers, they are willing to move on the issue, so who are we trying to help by retaining the export subsidy system?

The truth is that, so often, export subsidies help the middle man. They help those who make the money on agricultural produce before it reaches the supermarket shelf. Those interests seem to be regarded above those of our farmers or, indeed, farmers in the developing world, so I emphasise again the central importance of the export subsidy issue.

Before I leave the subject of financing development and its interrelationship with world trade, I appeal to the Minister to reconsider the proposal made by the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), on the advocacy fund. The sole purpose of that fund was to give developing nations a resource to enable them to be represented at trade negotiations by experts of equal calibre to our own. In practice, however, they are not. The figures are startling. At the most recent trade round, the EU had 582 representatives, whereas very small countries, such as Haiti, had none. The purpose of the advocacy fund is to ensure that developing countries are properly represented.

A counter-proposal from the Government is to give the Governments of developing countries budgetary support, so that they have the funds to provide representatives, but given all the competing priorities that those countries have to deal with, when the budgetary support comes through, it is not used for that purpose. Given the urgency of the negotiations in Cancun in September, where no time can be wasted, surely my party's proposal on the advocacy fund could be revisited.

The situation is all the more urgent because, as I was disturbed to learn from the Foreign Ministers of Tanzania, Malawi and Ghana at a recent meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on Africa, there is huge pressure on African, Caribbean and Pacific countries to be fragmented and not to speak with one voice at the trade negotiations. Yielding to that pressure would immensely weaken their position.

The advocacy fund could be used to provide experts of equal calibre to those who represent the rich nations to ensure that the ACP countries hold together as a cohesive group. There is no question that the European Union and the United States, as trading blocs, wield enormous influence in trade negotiations, against which fragmented developing countries find it very difficult to hold their own. I want to impress on the Minister that he should look again at our proposal.

I was encouraged to hear the hon. Member for Richmond Park speak about private investments. I do not think it was a heresy; the hon. Lady would expect someone from the Conservative party to understand the benefit of what she described—the importance of private financial investment in developing countries. The reality is that the scale of investment enormously overshadows our overseas development assistance; it is of huge significance. The Minister attended the same all-party parliamentary group as I did, and it was refreshing to speak directly to the representatives of developing countries and to hear from them what they want. They very much want private sector investment; it is important to put that on the record. It is not something that is being unwillingly inflicted on them, which is the impression that the anti-capitalist lobby sometimes tries to create.

Genuine private sector investment, responsibly done, can have a huge transforming power on development for good. I emphasise that it must be responsibly done, because we all understand the historical pitfalls and mistakes, and we do not want them to be repeated. However, the Minister might take one thing on board and actively promote it: he might recall that at the Rio plus 10 summit in Johannesburg, the London principles for corporate social responsibility were announced. They were completely lost in the media coverage of the negative aspects of that summit and its failure to make any real progress, but there were constructive, home-grown, City of London-based proposals for actively encouraging corporate social responsibility in relation to developing countries.

That was a significant development, because in the world stock markets there is much more interest by analysts in how the private sector conducts itself in

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developing countries; that is healthy. For example, every company quoted on the Dow Jones index is analysed according to an index of socially responsible investment—the Dow Jones SRI. Companies cannot opt out or in; if they want to be quoted on that stock market index they have to undergo a process of analysis. There is something similar in the City of London—the FTSE 4 Good index—although it is a voluntary process of analysis. However, companies that want to be seen to be playing a socially responsible part in development seek to be assessed according to whether they operate in a socially responsible way in developing countries.

Increasingly around the world, analysts consider matters that go beyond whether there is an entry in the company's glossy annual report. The process of analysis is detailed and in depth, and the really good thing is that because there is a variety of indices on the stock markets for assessing socially responsible investment, and a degree of competition between stock markets to find out how companies are operating, the different processes of analysis get to the bottom of what is going on. I am in favour of there being more than one index, because it is much more likely that bad practice will be picked up if experts analyse the different ways in which companies conduct themselves.

Dr. Tonge: This is fascinating stuff and I congratulate the hon. Lady. I am enjoying her contribution. Could those stock market indices be combined with the OECD guidelines that we have heard so much about? There is no compulsion on companies at present to obey the guidelines; they are merely advisory. Could they be combined with listing on the stock market? I do not understand how these things work.

Mrs. Spelman: I am not a technical expert in this area. However, my instinctive feeling is that they are completely different tools, but they may have a similar effect. I support the view that the OECD guidelines must be given more teeth. It is fine to sign up to these things, but if guidelines do not have any impact on the conduct of companies, how valuable are they?

The indices of corporate social responsibility are powerful because they affect the amount of investment that companies attract on the stock market. Companies are quoted on the stock market in order to attract investment so that they can expand and grow. If they have a black mark on the index of socially responsible investment, they do not attract investors. Originally, the concept was built up because many people—I count myself among them—want to have confidence when they invest in a company that it conducts itself in an ethical manner, especially in very poor countries.

This is one of the fastest growth markets for investment. It is no longer only the specialists who want to make ethical investments. A failure in terms of socially responsible investment has a wider impact on the market of potential investors in the companies concerned. The index is therefore a powerful tool, but it is different from the guidelines. However, those tools have a similar aim.

Another important subject is financing for development in the context of aid effectiveness. We all accept that developing countries are held back by lack of finance. All three of us—a select band—are politicians and we know that one of the problems in this area is that Governments of whatever persuasion have to make difficult choices about how to disburse public money—taxpayers' money and money levied in other ways over which the Government of the day have jurisdiction.

Overseas development assistance has to compete with a lot of other priorities, all of which are screaming for the Government's attention, and it has been difficult to meet the United Nations 0.7 per cent. target for ODA spending . All three of us are committed to achieving that target. It is depressing that we spend more as a nation on ice cream than on overseas development assistance.

As politicians, we are the people who, if in power, have to persuade our colleagues—especially the Chancellor of the day—to increase ODA spending. Every time the Chancellor has increased spending on that, it has been welcomed by the shadow Chancellor. However, we have also to demonstrate to the wider public that this is a good use of their money and that our aid is effective.

I encourage the Minister to look more closely at aid effectiveness. The hon. Member for Richmond Park mentioned the effectiveness of micro-credit, and I commend that to the Minister. It has been an incredible success with regard to finance in the developing world, flying in the face of the myth that if one lends money to poor people in developing countries one never gets it back. The default rate for micro-finance is minimal compared to default rates for credit given in rich nations such as ours. That has been a successful initiative that needs more encouragement.

I would like the Minister to comment on aid effectiveness and good governance. In terms of financing development, at the moment we have a tendency to make matters worse for some developing countries that do not achieve the sort of three-star rating that the hon. Member for Richmond Park referred to. We hold back development assistance—at one level, perhaps, understandably—from countries that are in conflict or corrupt, but there must be other ways to provide aid more effectively to countries that do not qualify for budgetary support by other means. We have rather a crude mechanism at the moment, in which financing for development seems to reward good performance, although we have not found a way of reaching poor performers more effectively. We need to find a more creative solution to that.

On development assistance, politicians of all parties who are interested in the issue of how to improve finance for development have to pass what I call the cab driver test: if we went out of the Chamber this afternoon and hired a cab, and asked the driver, "Do you think that we should spend more of taxpayers' money on overseas aid?", what reaction would we get? That is the test that politicians have to undergo at every general election when making choices about how to disburse money.

The problem is that there is quite a lot of public scepticism about whether the money really gets through. A stock phrase—it is very unfair to the Swiss—comes to mind: "Doesn't it all end up in Swiss bank accounts, Mrs. Spelman?" That is what people often say to me. "Can I give with any confidence? Can I be sure that the

money will get through? How can I be confident that my taxes will trickle down to those that really need the money?"

The focus on aid effectiveness is inextricably linked to financing development. That is not as simple as upping the percentage of aid, or selecting countries that are performing quite well; it is a complex matrix. However, the test, and our purpose in trying to raise the finance needed in the developing world, is to ensure that money is demonstrably getting through to those who need it. I urge the Minister to focus on the suggestions that both Front-Bench spokesmen have made today on how to make the work of the Department even more effective.

4.36 pm

Hilary Benn: With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to respond to this small but not imperfectly formed debate, which has once again proved Westminster Hall's unique capacity for allowing Members to come together and debate issues in a way that allows all who contribute to add something to our understanding of the problem.

I thank the hon. Members for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) and for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) for their thoughtful and stimulating contributions. The debate is part of a continuing dialogue, not only between Members of Parliament, but with the people whom we represent and across the globe, as it must be if we are to make progress and make a difference. In the end, people will judge us on whether what we have done makes a difference.

Cynicism is not a trait that I associate with the hon. Member for Richmond Park, so I took heed when she said that she was slightly cynical about the international finance facility. I hasten to point out that in describing it this afternoon I was not re-announcing it. It is out there; I was simply describing what I genuinely believe to be a creative response to the identified problem of the shortage of the money that we need if we are to make progress in achieving the millennium development goals.

Of course, the IFF will work only if a sufficient number of people sign up to it, but the beauty of the idea is that it uses what people have already committed themselves to giving. People will have to provide the committed amount in the years ahead, but the scheme uses that commitment to borrow money for expenditure up front. The facility is a kind of mortgage, because it builds on the future repayment of bonds to produce a sum that can be spent earlier. That will allow faster progress to be made towards the millennium development goals. It is the best idea around that could enable us to do that.

When we read the Zedillo report and see that there is a $50 billion shortfall, it would be easiest to throw up our hands in horror and say, "Well, isn't it all terribly difficult, and isn't it sad that we can't make any progress?" Those involved in the political process are saying about the IFF, "Well, here's an idea; how about it?" We, and others who have expressed support for the process, are trying to persuade people that the IFF is a good idea that can be made to work and will address the problem that all of us are concerned about. It is no more and no less than that. If it were to succeed and if we were to persuade people of the benefits of the facility, it would be a practical contribution to solving the problem. I want to make that clear.

We have debated trade reform at some length both here and in the main Chamber. We are at one about CAP reform, which the hon. Member for Meriden spoke about with some passion. As a country, we have been trying for a long time to reform the CAP. I think back to the famous renegotiations carried out by Prime Minister Harold Wilson in 1974–75, before the referendum. That process proved extremely difficult, but I regard what was achieved three weeks ago as a significant step forward. It has begun to break the link between payment and production, while recognising the fact that member states have different interests. It is right that the Government should come under pressure from Opposition parties to do something about it, but we know that a solution can be reached only if there is agreement among member states about the need to make progress.

Mrs. Spelman: What troubles me about the outcome of the reform talks is that, although the intention is to break the link, a significant number of domestic subsidies have a long transition period before they are phased out. We have seen that happen before. There is an added problem in that, because there is no peace clause for the domestic subsidies after 31 December, the long transition period could result in an all-out trade war unless the subsidies are phased out more rapidly or a peace clause between the trade partners is concluded.

Hilary Benn: I appreciate the hon. Lady's point. No one wants an all-out trade war. The onus is on everyone at the meeting at Cancun, in particular, to build on what has already been achieved by the agreement that has been reached and to recognise that it is only a step along the way. We must all acknowledge that more must be done, especially about subsidies.

The hon. Lady talked about support for advocacy. We both attended the all-party group meeting, and what was so striking about the contribution from the three Trade, Industry and Commerce Ministers was that they were absolutely clear about what they wanted for their own country. They did not say that they had not been able to think matters through; they knew exactly what they wanted.

We hear those voices far too rarely in such debates because, too often, the debate about what is good for developing countries is conducted between people from developed countries. I wish that we could hear the voices that we heard at that meeting more often. That would lead to a more informed debate in the media and throughout the country. I was struck by the fact that those Ministers knew what they wanted.

Ours is not a counter-proposal to the advocacy fund. We are already undertaking such work. From memory, we are in the process of spending about £38 million from the £45 million. We want to build capacity within the countries concerned. I say to the hon. Lady that the right place for that capacity to be built is in Finance and Trade Ministries because that is where policy is formulated, as it is in this country. In those circumstances, if we build such capacity for the long term using budget support and other technical assistance that we provide to Governments, we will enhance the capacity of representatives at such meetings to be clear about what they want.

[Hilary Benn]

The hon. Lady referred to pressures to fragment the developing country bloc. It is important that developing countries stick together in negotiations and use the power that they have, recognising that in the end there will have to be an agreement in Cancun to stick up for what they think is important. They will say to us, as they said very clearly at the meeting, that if any progress is to be made we will have to deliver on agriculture, on TRIPS and access to medicine and on special and differential treatment, which we have not touched on this afternoon but which is extremely important.

Dr. Tonge: Before the Minister leaves the subject, will he tell us why we did not support the French proposals on subsidies?

Hilary Benn: We did support the French proposals, but they did not get anywhere at the summit. We will have to return to that issue when we get to Cancun.

On foreign investment, we are, I think, at one. The hon. Lady made an important point in reminding us of our own history as a country. How did we develop economically? To draw a parallel, during the development of the mills in Leeds, people came to the city because of what had happened in the countryside. The mills were established and people invested in them. At the time, the working conditions were very bad and there was a lot of poverty. The response to the disadvantages and to the problems created by industrialisation was not to say to the mill owners, "Please take your mill and get out of town." People decided to get organised and to do something to improve the working conditions, because they recognised that they needed a way of earning a living. The issue is how to enable countries to earn their living and to pay their way, and how to give people the chance of a job and the chance to bring up a family.

The point that the hon. Lady made about the role that foreign investment plays in the process is extremely important. Again, if we reflect on our own experience, in the north-east, as traditional industries declined, the first thing that we did was to cast around for other people, including foreign people, to come to invest in the area. The same is true for developing countries. When I went to Indonesia, I asked how the rates paid by foreign-owned companies there compared with those paid by domestic industries. I was struck by the answer: it turned out that the foreign-owned companies paid—from memory—12 to 20 per cent. more.

Of course, the rates are low compared with what is paid in the United States or the United Kingdom, but in comparison to what else is on offer for people and their families, they are actually better. We need to acknowledge that, while recognising that the circumstances of foreign investment, its confidence and its willingness to stay, will depend a lot on the framework of governance, on the rules and regulations, on the recourse to the courts and on all the things that we now understand much more about. Those all contribute to the prospects for economic development. Such development is what the countries want; they only want for themselves what we want for ourselves and what we have been able to experience because of our history.

The hon. Member for Meriden was absolutely right—and I agree completely with her—about the increasing interest in companies' corporate practices and ethical reputation. Undoubtedly, one of the really powerful forces in society, which will encourage companies to do things better and to do them right, is the risk of damage to their reputation if they do things badly or do them wrong. Developments such as the ethical training initiative, the Dow Jones index to which the hon. Lady referred and the extractive industries transparency initiative that we launched, which gets companies and countries in those industries to be honest and open about who pays what to whom, are all steps to make the process more transparent.

We can use the pressure to which the hon. Lady referred to improve performance, because companies are concerned about their reputation. I understood that most forcefully when I was previously at the Department and I attended a meeting of an association that brought together all the British toy manufacturers. Very few of them manufacture in the UK; most do so abroad. The person making the presentation started with a slide that showed dead bodies in a toy factory in China which caught fire. He said to the assembled ranks of the industry that the reason why they were sitting there, talking about signing up to a code of practice for sourcing toys that they import into the UK, was that they did not want that—he pointed to the slide—ever to happen again. He made the point extremely forcefully, and that is one example of how one industry is trying to improve what it does.

I would be happy to write to the hon. Member for Richmond Park on micro-credit because some developments have taken place. She referred to the Grameen bank initiative that started the process. We support micro-credit schemes in a variety of ways, and I would be happy to let her have further information on that.

The hon. Lady raised the issue of the Africa and Asia development performance funds. We put some money aside at the start of the year to be called upon, during the year, by country programmes where we think that it can be used to good effect. We could allocate all the money irrevocably at the start of the year, but we need to bear in mind that progress is made at different speeds, some things may not work and there may be delay. We have simply used that device to ensure that we use the money that we have most effectively during the course of the year. That is how it works, and it is not a matter of anything else.

I agree with the point that the hon. Member for Meriden made about the importance of aid effectiveness, including the importance of delivering if we have pledged money. In general, the UK has a pretty good record. I know that the hon. Lady was not criticising us, but she is right to draw attention to the gap that can exist between pledges and the actual commitment of money.

On debt relief, only eight countries have reached completion point, but 26 countries have reached decision point, and the debt relief kicks in at the decision point. The international community increasingly accepts the need to review and top up at completion point because of the problems of continued debt

unsustainability and the question of the impact of falls in commodity prices. We have pressed for that and we continue to do so.

The hon. Lady is right about the need for overseas development assistance. The last point that I want to make links that issue and the cab driver challenge that she gave us. She is right about the need to persuade the public, our parties and the Chancellor. The truth is that some Governments are more successful than others in having that debate. Some Chancellors listen more readily than others, as the current holder of that office has demonstrated. We can see what has happened to our overseas aid budget, in absolute terms and as a share of GNP, in the six years since the current Government were elected.

The debate demonstrates the power of the political process to make a difference, and the key phrase that arises from it is political will. This is a matter of the extent to which there is the political will to have an argument with the cab driver, to persuade the Chancellor, to argue with our constituents or to persuade the parties that we represent that the matter is a priority.

There are many different ways that we can have that conversation and apply our political will to make a difference, but increasingly the world understands how much we depend on, and are affected by, events that occur in other countries compared with the situation 20, 50 or 100 years ago. That is partly because we see more of those events on our television screens. That is a great motivator for political action because people see them, are appalled and ask why we are not doing something about them. That was the case with the famine in Ethiopia.

We are now getting coverage of what has been happening in the Democratic Republic of Congo—a terrible conflict in which millions of people have lost their lives. That was largely hidden from the world's view. How did we make the modest but not unimportant step of getting an international force into Bunia? It happened because people saw the conflict. Increasingly, we experience the consequences of conflict and the failure of states when people come to this country. Certainly when, as constituency MPs, we meet asylum seekers who come to us for help, we are brought face to face with the consequences of failing to do something about the problem.

Finally, there is the moral argument, which one can never escape. It simply is not right that 130 million kids do not go to school every day or that kids die because their countries, families and medical and health systems do not have the means to deal with completely preventable diseases. The debate really does matter, because it is about the future of the world.

We may be small in number this afternoon, but we have had a very good debate, and I am grateful to my two hon. Friends, and I call them that advisedly, for their contribution.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Five o'clock.

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 14 July 2003

TRANSPORT

London Underground

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): In my written statement of 4 June I said that I intended to transfer London Underground to Transport for London on or about 15 July, subject to the passage of the Railways and Transport Safety Bill which was then before Parliament. The Railways and Transport Safety Bill received Royal Assent on 10 July.

I have accordingly approved, with amendments, the transfer scheme for the transfer of London Underground Limited from London Regional Transport to Transport for London that London Regional Transport sealed and submitted to me on 4 June. The London Underground will transfer to Transport for London on 15 July 2003.

This transfer will give effect to the wish of Parliament originally set out in the Greater London Authority Act 1999. It will transfer all of London Regional Transport's remaining property, rights and liabilities to Transport for London. I intend to wind up London Regional Transport shortly afterwards.

Crossrail

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): I have now received from Cross London Rail Links (CLRL) their business case proposals for the East-West London Crossrail project. The House will find it helpful to have an indication of what these proposals involve and how the Government plan to take them forward.

The purpose of Crossrail is to provide a significant increase in the capacity of the present rail networks into and across London so as to relieve congestion and overcrowding, to cater for the expected substantial growth in demand for travel into and across the capital over the coming decades, and to improve accessibility.

I am grateful for all the work which has been done by CLRL and their shareholders, the SRA and TfL, in developing the latest proposals for Crossrail, and in refining the analysis in the interim business case which they submitted to me in February.

Following analysis of a range of route options, CLRL have now proposed the adoption of what they have termed the benchmark scheme, involving a central East-West tunnel across London, with services extending to two branches to the East and two to the West.

In more detail, CLRL's proposed route option would involve a central tunnel following closely the currently protected alignment across London, from west of Paddington to east of Liverpool Street. From Liverpool Street, the line would be extended through Whitechapel, beyond which it would divide into two branches both serving the Thames Gateway—one going to Stratford and joining the existing Great Eastern lines to Shenfield; the other going down through the Isle of Dogs and the Royal Docks, crossing the Thames to join the North Kent lines at Abbey Wood, with some services continuing to Ebbsfleet.

To the west of Paddington, the line would join the Great Western main line before dividing into two further branches. One would join up with the North London Line providing services to Richmond and Kingston. The other would be via Ealing and Hayes to Heathrow along the existing branch served by Heathrow Express. This would be subject to the Crossrail promoters securing a satisfactory agreement with BAA, which owns the Heathrow access rights to this branch.

CLRL have advised that they believe implementation of the benchmark scheme would cost some £10 billion in 2002 prices, including an allowance for contingencies, although the actual cost will depend on final decisions on the route and construction phasing, following appraisal and public consultation. Their analysis indicates that the project should produce benefits significantly greater than this, taking account of the anticipated levels of growth in employment and population in London in the Mayor's draft London plan. CLRL's transport and economic case for the project rests on this positive assessment of likely benefits over costs. There are also potentially significant regeneration benefits, particularly to the east of London, and to the longer term development of the Thames Gateway.

The Government continue to support the principle of building a new East-West Crossrail link. We see merit in the arguments for such an increase in capacity to support London's continued growth and success.

CLRL itself suggests that an all public sector funded option is unlikely to be affordable. We agree that the very high cost of the Crossrail project has major resource implications at a time when there are many other pressures on the transport budget, and on the public purse in general.

So if the project were to go ahead there would need to be a very substantial contribution to its costs from those who would benefit most from it. First, we envisage that there would need to be a very substantial contribution from London's business community—indeed I welcome the indications already made by London First and others of their willingness to contribute. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I are examining options here and we intend to consult the various London interests in the autumn.

Secondly, we shall be looking to ensure that where there are specific development opportunities arising from the project, we take full advantage of these and secure an appropriate contribution to the cost of the project from the developers concerned and thirdly, there is an issue over the appropriate level of fares, given the benefits which will accrue not only to users of Crossrail itself, but also from the reduced congestion elsewhere on London's transport networks.

Given the importance and high cost of the project, the Government now need to evaluate the CLRL proposals for value and affordability. We need to be sure that we have a robust plan for delivering and funding the project, with effective mechanisms to ensure those who benefit from it contribute as fully as possible to meeting the costs and bearing the risks.

In order to give the project the best chance of success, I am assembling an expert team to assess the proposals so that I can be assured that they offer good value for London, and are deliverable to budget, to time and to scope. This assessment will be carried out as quickly as possible consistent with the scale and complexity of the proposals and the extent to which key components of them are still under development.

I have also been considering proposals for an alternative scheme for Crossrail put to me by the London Regional Metro (LRM) consortium. While their proposals have some attractions, it would not be appropriate to proceed with LRM without an open competition. So we will seek to ensure that if and when Crossrail proceeds, the terms of any competition for its development would allow scope for LRM and other interested parties to bring forward their innovative ideas.

I have also concluded that the most appropriate way to seek powers for the project would be by way of a Hybrid Bill which the Government would be willing in principle to promote at an appropriate point once the evaluation is completed and a comprehensive funding package agreed. I am asking CLRL to continue work on development of their detailed project proposals so that they would be ready to support a hybrid Bill.

I am also inviting CLRL to advise me on updating the safeguarding for the route, and to undertake a public consultation exercise in the autumn to explain in more detail their proposed scheme, and to canvass views on their route proposals.

I welcome the proposals for the East-West London Crossrail and want to move forward. When the Department has carried out a thorough review of the project, and we have the results of the consultation exercise by CLRL, as well as the outcome of the consultation with business on funding options, we will be in a position to take firm and soundly-based decisions on the way forward for the project.

HEALTH

Meat Hygiene Service

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Miss Melanie Johnson): The 2002–03 annual report and accounts for the Meat Hygiene Service was laid before Parliament today.

Copies will be placed in the Library, but formal printing and publication will not occur for another six to eight weeks, pending preparation of a version in Welsh as required by the Welsh Language Act 1993.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Riot (Damages) Act 1886

The Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing, and Community Safety (Ms Hazel Blears): We have today published a consultation paper that looks at the origin and past operation of the Riot (Damages) Act 1886 (RDA) and seeks the views of stakeholders on the future of the RDA.

The RDA is more than 100 years old. Both society and the nature of policing have changed dramatically in that time. In particular, in the light of the Government's radical police reform programme, we need to look at whether the Act is still appropriate in the 21st century.

Currently the RDA makes a police authority in England and Wales liable to pay for damages to buildings and their contents when a riot has taken place. Police authorities, the police service and others have argued for some time that the principle underpinning the RDA—that a riot presents a culpable failure to provide adequate policing—is no longer appropriate to modern conditions. There is also concern that police authorities are subject to unlimited liability for riot damage under the RDA.

It is also argued that the RDA provides a safety net for businesses and households—particularly in inner city areas, which have traditionally been more at risk of civil disturbances—and where property owners may have difficulties obtaining insurance, at least at affordable rates. Without the protection provided by the RDA, vulnerable communities could be at risk of further economic decline.

At a time when the police service is engaged in a programme of major reform it seems appropriate to consider whether the RDA remains appropriate to 21st century needs. We are therefore inviting views on the future of the RDA and, specifically, whether the RDA should be

Retained as it stands;

Repealed entirely; or

Reformed to limit liability for claims

Comments and suggestions are requested on these specific issues but any alternative approaches or views to those outlined would be welcome.

The Government haVE an open mind on the options and look forward to hearing the views of interested parties.

We hope that the consultation will improve the evidence base to help develop a more detailed impact assessment.

Options 2 and 3 would require primary legislation.

Responses to the consultation paper are requested by 9 October 2003.

A copy of the document has been placed in the Library and is available at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/inside/consults/current/index.html.

Shipman Inquiry

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): This morning, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and I are publishing and laying before Parliament the Shipman Inquiry's Second and Third Reports: "The Police Investigation of March 1998", and "Death Certification and the Investigation of Deaths by Coroners". These follow the publication, last year, of the First Report, "Death Disguised", which established the extent of Harold Shipman's activities. The Inquiry's final reports on controlled drugs and disciplinary systems and complaints are expected next year.

My right hon. Friend and I would like to thank Dame Janet Smith for the considerable work, care and attention that have obviously gone into the preparation of these reports. We also wish to reiterate our sympathy to the relatives and friends of Shipman's victims. For their sake and in the wider interest of the community, it is essential that lessons are learned from these dreadful events.

The Second Report covers the investigation conducted by the Greater Manchester Police in March and April 1998, five months before Harold Shipman was arrested. It makes it clear that, whilst the Inquiry does not blame police management systems, the conduct of those officers involved in this specific investigation fell below the standard which the community is entitled to expect of public servants in their position. There was a subsequent internal inquiry by Greater Manchester Police into the failure of the March 1998 investigation. In the words of Dame Janet this inquiry was "quite inadequate".

I take the judgment of the Shipman Inquiry on the Greater Manchester Police extremely seriously. For the initial investigation to have failed is severe enough but for the subsequent investigation into their handling to have been so flawed requires the most urgent and strenuous efforts to ensure that such an event could never recur. It is for Greater Manchester Police to investigate but I await their report, and will expect rapid and effective action as well as lessons to be learnt by other forces in response.

I have asked my officials to work closely with the Greater Manchester Police to establish what can usefully be drawn from the report and to offer appropriate support and advice. We will help Greater Manchester Police to move forward. Through the Home Office Police Standards Unit and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary we are already working with the force to deliver performance improvements for the benefits of those living and working in the Force area.

It will also be for Greater Manchester Police to decide what action may be appropriate in relation to any individual police officer. I have written to the Chief Constable to ask to be kept informed of how the criticism against individuals in the Force is being addressed.

The report recommends that guidance should be issued to those detective officers who have to undertake investigations into allegations of wrongdoing by health professionals. Work on this is already underway. The Association of Chief Police Officers and the Department of Health, with the advice of the Health and Safety Executive, are jointly developing a memorandum of understanding. This sets out the roles and responsibilities of both organisations when a serious incident takes place or is suspected of occurring, and principles for effective liaison when criminal investigations may be needed into such incidents involving NHS patients. The memorandum will also refer to other guidance on incidents of this type; for example, guidance to police Senior Investigating Officers, which the report identified as being developed.

The Third Report found systemic shortcomings within the cremation arrangements and coroner system. The report of the Fundamental Review of Coroner Services and Death Certification, published on 4 June, identified similar inadequacies, although the solutions proposed are slightly different.

As I announced when the earlier report was published, in order to assist the Government to develop a coherent long-term strategy for the future of our death investigation processes, I have asked the Chair of the Fundamental Review, Mr Tom Luce, to conduct some further work to link the review's recommendations to the findings of the Shipman Inquiry. This will enable us to formulate a comprehensive programme of reform later this year, taking into account both sets of observations and recommendations.

Dame Janet makes two recommendations for short-term improvement: that cremation certification procedures should be strengthened and that practices in coroners' offices should be improved. As a matter of urgency, my officials are discussing these proposals with the relevant agencies as part of our existing programme to take forward interim measures to improve these services. We shall ensure that guidance to deliver more robust procedures and practices is issued as soon as possible.

My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury last week published a consultation document on modernisation of the civil registration service, including death certification. Like the Fundamental Review of Coroner Services and Death Certification, this also presents an opportunity for comprehensive reform, this time specifically of the registration service and its interaction with related services.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pension Credit

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): The Government are well advanced in their preparations for the delivery of Pension Credit from October 2003.

We have recruited extra staff and invested in new infrastructure to meet the additional demands of the new entitlement and we are making best use of the phased take-on during the advanced applications stage

in the lead up to October. Not only will this prove our systems, but it will also ensure that we learn from experience before the main take-on begins.

An existing, tried and tested computer system will be used to process applications and to make payments from October. We are writing to pensioner households giving them information about Pension Credit and inviting them to apply for it. A freephone telephone application line is fully operational and is taking applications now.

We are also working with partner organisations, such as Help The Aged, Age Concern and Citizens Advice, amongst others, both at a national and local level, to encourage eligible people to take up their entitlement. I can now report the following progress on applications for Pension Credit. There are over 1.1 million pensioner households already on our systems, ready to be paid Pension Credit from October.

We are making good progress in transferring those receiving Minimum Income Guarantee automatically onto Pension Credit and will have transferred all these cases by October.

There is plenty of time for pensioners to apply for Pension Credit. To ensure pensioners do not lose out, there will be a twelve month backdating provision until October 2004. This will allow applications to be backdated to October 2003 where entitlement exists or to the date entitlement begins, if this is later.

In September we will be launching a major advertising campaign on TV and in the press ready for the main launch in October.

I am placing a chart showing progress so far in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Horticulture Research International

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): Following the statement made on 20 January 2003, I wish to report further developments in respect of the restructuring of Horticulture Research International (HRI).

I am pleased to report that DEFRA has reached agreement with the University of Warwick about the future of HRI Wellesbourne and Kirton. We believe that the agreement will provide a stable and sustainable future for HRI and meet the core recommendations of the independent Quinquennial Review team.

Subject to finalising the details of the agreement and confirmation of the conclusion of a DEFRA business case that it represents best value, we expect the settlement with the University to contain the following key elements:

(a) HRI will continue to serve the horticulture industry as part of the University;

(b) DEFRA will grant the University a guaranteed research contract for an agreed programme of work. The contract will be for eight years at a total annual value of £5 million in years 1 to 6, £3.5 million in year 7 and £2 million in year 8;

(c) DEFRA will transfer HRIfs sites at Wellesbourne, Warwickshire and Kirton, Lincolnshire to the University with effect from 1 April 2004, subject to "clawback" arrangements to protect the public purse;

(d) The University will make a financial contribution equivalent to the value of the dwellings and agricultural land at Wellesbourne as assessed by the Valuation Office Agency;

(e) Following a programme of redundancies, the remaining HRI staff at Wellesbourne and Kirton will transfer to the employment of the University on TUPE terms with effect from 1 April 2004;

(f) The University will inherit ongoing redundancy and pension liabilities of transferring staff; and

(g) DEFRA will make a financial contribution to outstanding works required in respect of the Wellesbourne and Kirton estates.

We plan to exchange letters of intent with the University as soon as practicable followed by a business transfer agreement in the autumn, subject to negotiations and the DEFRA business case.

The independent Quinquennial Review team recommended that HRI Efford should close. The University of Warwick has indicated that it does not wish to acquire the site. DEFRA and HRI have carefully considered the Review team's recommendation alongside other options and, regrettably, concluded that Efford should close in October. Staff at Efford will have access to the same support services as those similarly affected at other HRI sites and will receive redundancy compensation in line with agreed terms and procedures. The land and buildings at Efford are a valuable public asset which will be sold on the open market and the receipts invested in the wider restructuring of HRI. HRI will ensure that existing contracts at Efford are honoured. DEFRA will facilitate discussions with the horticulture industry and the research community about the need, if any, to make specific alternative provision for the research capability presently offered by Efford.

Negotiations are continuing between DEFRA and the East Mailing Trust for Horticultural Research about the establishment of East Mailing and Wye as an independent research station. The East Mailing Trust has made proposals which we plan to discuss with it later in July. It is in everyone's interests to ensure that the new research station would be financially viable on the basis of a mixed portfolio of funding as recommended by the Quinquennial Review team. We aim to decide the future of East Mailing and Wye by the end of September at the latest.

TREASURY

Double Taxation Convention (Chile)

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): A comprehensive Double Taxation Convention with Chile was signed on 12 July 2003. After signature both texts were deposited in the Library of the House and made available on the Inland Revenue's website. The text of the Convention will be scheduled to a draft Order in Council and laid for consideration by the House at the earliest convenient opportunity.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British Nationals Detained Overseas

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): As part of a wider review of how we make the most effective use of our Consular resources to help British nationals in distress overseas, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has considered the issue of visiting British nationals in prison overseas.

The welfare of British nationals in foreign prisons is one of the key concerns of consular staff. Our staff seek to ensure that prisoners' rights are respected in accordance with international standards. This includes ensuring that they have access to legal representation and that their welfare needs are met during their detention.

Once a British national has been given a custodial sentence, our aim has been to visit them once a year, or more frequently if possible.

This approach does not however take account of the wide variation in prison conditions and practices between different countries. In European Union countries, Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, North America and Australasia, we are satisfied that, in general, prison conditions meet international standards and are comparable to those in the UK. From 1 September this year, our aim will therefore be to visit prisoners in these countries once after sentencing, and thereafter, only if the real need arises. In addition, consular staff can maintain contact with prisoners by telephone and fax and encourage local prison volunteer groups to visit them.

In all other countries, where prison conditions give us more cause for concern, the aim of consular staff will be to continue to visit prisoners on a regular basis. This is likely to be at least once a year, and as often as once a month where circumstances warrant it. The new policy will allow us to provide our consular services on the basis of greatest need and to concentrate on countries where our consular assistance can be most beneficial.

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 15 July 2003

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

UK Climate Impacts Programme

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): Today, the DEFRA-funded UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) is publishing its report Climate change and local communities—how prepared are you? The report informs local authorities of the key implications of climate change for their business functions and offers them guidance to help them adapt. It has been produced for local authorities by UKCIP in partnership with the Local Government Association and the Improvement and Development Agency. Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Animal Health and Welfare Strategy

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I have arranged for copies of the Government's Animal Health and Welfare Strategy for Great Britain to be made available in the Libraries of both Houses. Produced jointly by DEFRA, the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly, the outline strategy is being circulated for public consultation, with a deadline for comments of 31 October.

Copies are also available on the DEFRA website at http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh

Darwin Initiative

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): I am pleased to announce to the House awards under a new funding scheme forming part of DEFRA's Darwin Initiative.

The Darwin Initiative is an annual small grants programme which uses UK expertise working with local partners to help countries rich in biodiversity but poor in resources to conserve and use their biodiversity sustainably. Launched at the Rio summit in 1992, the initiative has committed more than £30 million to over 300 projects in around 100 countries. More than 100 projects are currently running. The Prime Minister announced an increase in the Darwin Initiative budget in his speech on WSSD in September. The budget increased from £3 million to £4 million in 2003–04 and will rise to £5 million in 2004–05, and £7 million a year from 2005–06. Three new Darwin Initiative schemes have been launched as part of Phase II of the Initiative: Darwin Initiative scholarships, pre-project awards and post-project funding. Together these will help to help embed the core aims of capacity building, partnership and legacy. I announced the Scholarship awards at the annual Darwin lecture on 21 May.

The awards of pre-project funding are as follows: (Annex B)

Organisation	*Project Title*	*Country*	*Award £*
The Society for Environmental Exploration	Capacity building for sustainable management in the Nicaraguan Pacific Region	Nicaragua	1,790
Macauley Land Use Research Institute	Community conservation action plan for the threatened long-tailed chinchilla in Chile	Chile	1,792
Foundation for International Environmental Law and Development	Conservation and sustainable use of Agriculture Biodiversity in Costa Rica	Costa Rica	1,425
The Global Diversity Foundation	Conservation status of botanical resources in protected areas of Sabah, Malaysia	Sabah, Malaysia	1,600
University of Southampton	Control of Alien Species: the Red-Bellied Beautiful Squirrel in Argentina	Argentina	1,205
University of Wales, Bangor	In Situ conservation of Indigenous tree species in Southern Cameroon	Cameroon	1,520
British Trust for Ornithology	Meeting biodiversity and socio-economic targets in Ugandan agricultural development	Uganda	2,650
Plymouth Marine Laboratory	Namibia Marine Biodiversity Baseline	Namibia	2,400
Centre for Ecology and Hydrology	Selection, propagation, multiplication and distribution of indigenous tree species	Sierra Leone	1,705
University of Oxford	Sustainable Management of Forest Medicinal Plants by Peruvian Indigenous Communities	Peru	3,000
Royal Holloway Institute for Environmental Research	The macroinvertebrates of riverine wetlands in Ghana	Ghana	2,861
Tree Council	Tomsk Forestry and Biodiversity Action Planning	Russia	2,188
The Natural History Museum	Training the next generation of Papua New Guinea's conservation biologists	Papua New Guinea	3,000
Game Conservancy Trust	Sustainable management of burrowing mammals on the Tibetan Plateau	China	3,000
Cranfield University	Functional roles of soil microbial diversity in logged ecosystems in Malaysia	Malaysia	2,900
			33,037

British-Irish Council Report of Climate Change

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): On 24 July 2003, on behalf of the British-Irish Council (BIC) Environment Group, my Department is publishing the report scenarios of climate change for islands within the BIC region. The report builds on the climate change scenarios for the UK published by my Department last year and provides new detail on how climate is likely to change for the islands of the BIC region—Channel Islands, Isle of Man, Western Isles, Orkney Islands, and Shetland Islands. There is now considerable interest in climate change impacts and adaptation in the island administrations following awareness-raising workshops at the end of last year, and the scenarios will provide a sound basis for further work in this area. These new scenarios represent a concrete example of how BIC can foster co-operation between the UK, Ireland and the island administrations on environmental issues of common interest like climate change.

Copies of the report will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses on the day of the launch.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Forensic Science Northern Ireland

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. John Spellar): I have today published the Forensic Science Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2002–03. The annual report sets out the performance of the agency against key targets. Copies of the report have today been laid in the House of Commons.

Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Angela Smith): I have today arranged for the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland Corporate Plan 2003–06 and Business Plan 2003–04 document to be placed in the House Libraries. This document will also be made available on the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland website at http://www.osni.gov.uk/

Northern Ireland Assembly Elections (Registered Parties and Candidates) Reimbursement Scheme

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): I am announcing today the publication of the Northern Ireland Assembly Elections (Registered Parties and Candidates) Reimbursement Scheme 2003 in accordance with section 3 of the Northern Ireland Assembly (Elections and Periods of Suspension) Act 2003. The scheme has been finalised following the submission to me of a number of recommendations by the Electoral Commission. I am pleased to say that all the recommendations meet the provisions of the Act.

I have the authority under Section 3 of the Act to make payments, in the form of a scheme, to registered political parties, in connection with their campaign expenditure and candidates, in connection with their election expenses. These parties and candidates would have contested the Northern Ireland Assembly election due on 29 May 2003 but postponed by the Act.

I will be writing to the Northern Ireland political parties today to inform them that I have published a scheme. The Electoral Commission will also write to the parties to give them full details of the scheme including clear explanatory notes.

Although I will be responsible for making payments to parties and candidates following recommendations made by the Electoral Commission, it will be the Commission who will have day-to-day responsibility for operating the scheme. The Commission will only recommend that a payment be made once it is satisfied that a party or candidate would have contested the May election and that the expenditure or expenses being claimed are in accordance with the requirements of the scheme. Claims will only be considered if they are sent to the Commission by 30 September 2003 at the latest and accompanied by the declarations required by the scheme and evidence to support the value of the claim. The Commission will also have the authority to verify all claims by asking for further information, explanations or inspections of documents or goods and property.

I am very grateful to the Commission for its help in putting the scheme together.

I have placed copies of the scheme in both Libraries.

Accounts (2001–02) Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): I have published today the Accounts of the Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

DEFENCE

Veterans' Challenge Fund

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): The Ministry of Defence is announcing today that it plans to allocate up to £2 million for veterans' projects over the next 3 years.

The new Challenge Fund will be used in co-operation with partners in the ex-Service organisations, Non Government Organisations and public sector to pump-prime new projects or research or buy into existing activities in order to give them a veterans-related dimension.

The Government want this fund to be used to help address the identifiable gaps in existing activity or knowledge that will need to be filled if we are to deliver the agreed Strategy for Veterans. The Strategy for Veterans identifies 3 key areas for further work: ensuring that as many Service personnel as possible make the transition from Service to civilian life successfully, that those who do not make a successful transition receive appropriate support, and that the contribution of the Services and veterans to national and international security is properly understood in wider society. The Government would like the Fund to be used to support a few projects in each area.

Five hundred thousand pounds has been made available for the remainder of this Financial Year and up to £750,000 is planned for each of the next two Financial Years. Arrangements for the longer term will depend on the success of the Fund over this initial three-year period.

UK Gulf Veterans' Mortality Data

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): Mortality figures for the United Kingdom veterans of the 1990–91 Gulf Conflict from 1 April 1991 to 31 December 2002 were published on 27 January 2003, *Official Report*, columns 28–30WS. The latest data, as at 30 June 2003, are shown in Table 1 below. As before, the data for Gulf veterans are compared to that of a control group, known as the Era cohort, which is made up of Armed Forces personnel of a similar size, age, gender, Service, regular/reservist status and rank who were not deployed. Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of deaths from cancer (neoplasm) by anatomical site.

On 23 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 910W, it was announced that the Ministry of Defence was discussing with the University of Manchester a detailed study of the factors underlying the figures for road traffic accident deaths. There are indications that the excess of motor vehicle accident deaths among Gulf veterans occurred principally during the first six years after the cessation of hostilities (to 31 March 1997) and that this trend has reversed in the following six years to 31 March 2003. Furthermore, the numbers of incidents are relatively small, the information on each accident is insufficiently detailed to allow meaningful analysis and a considerable amount of time has elapsed since 1 April 1991. Therefore, following the advice of the experts that have been consulted, we have decided not to commission the proposed study.

Table 1

Deaths to UK Gulf veterans (Note: 1) 1 April 1991 to 30 June 2003 Causes (coded to ICD-9) (Note: 2)

ICD Chapter	*Cause of death*	*Gulf*	*Era*[3]	*Mortality Rate Ratio*[4]
	All deaths	600	613	0.97
	All cause coded deaths	586	599	0.97
I–XVI	Disease-related causes	243	300	0.81
I	Infectious and parasitic diseases	4	2	1.99
II	Cancers	105	124	0.84
III	Endocrine and immune disorders	1	6	0.20
V	Mental orders	13	15	0.86
VI	Diseases of the nervous system and sense organs (Note 5)	10	11	0.90
VII	Diseases of the circulatory system	82	106	0.77
VIII	Diseases of the respiratory system	11	6	1.82
IX	Diseases of the digestive system	15	18	0.83
IV, X–XVI	All other disease-related causes (Note 6)	2	12	0.17
EXVII	External causes of injury and poisoning	343	299	1.14
	Railway accidents	4	1	3.98
	Motor vehicle accidents	118	100	1.17
	Water transport accidents	5	1	4.98
	Air and space accidents	25	19	1.31
	Other vehicle accidents	0	1	0.00
	Accidental poisoning	14	15	0.93
	Accidental falls	8	8	1.00
	Accidents due to fire/flames	0	2	0.00
	Accidents due to natural environmental factors	2	2	1.00
	Accidents due to submersion/ suffocation/foreign bodies	17	7	2.42
	Other accidents	31	29	1.06
	Late effects of accident/injury	0	2	0.00
	Suicide and injury undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted	110	103	1.06
	Homicide	6	5	1.19
	Injury resulting from the operations of war	3	4	0.75
	Other deaths for which coded cause data are not yet available	**11**	**10**	
	Overseas deaths for which cause data are not available	**3**	**4**	

Notes:

1. Service and Ex-Service personnel only.
2. World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases 9th revision, 1997.
3. The Era group comprises 53,143 personnel, randomly sampled from all UK Armed Forces personnel in service on 1 January 1991 and who did not deploy to the Gulf. This group is matched to the 53,409 Gulf veterans to reflect the socio-demographic and military composition of the Gulf cohort in terms of age, gender, Service (Army, Royal Navy, Royal Air Force), officer/other rank status, regular/reservist status, and a proxy measure for fitness.
4. Mortality rate ratios differ marginally from the crude deaths ratio owing to some small differences between the Gulf and Era cohorts.
5. These figures include four deaths from Motor Neurone Disease amongst the Gulf cohort and three in the Era group.
6. Includes cases with insufficient information on the death certificate to provide a known cause of death.

Table 2

Deaths due to neoplasms among UK veterans: 1 April to 30 June 2003

ICD 9	*Site*	*Gulf*	*Era*
140–239	All neoplasms	105	124
140–149	Malignant neoplasm of lip, oral cavity and pharynx	6	4
150–159	Malignant neoplasm of digestive organs and peritoneum	22	30
160–165	Malignant neoplasm of respiratory and intrathoracic organs	17	25

ICD 9	*Site*	*Gulf*	*Era*
170–175	Malignant neoplasm of bone, connective tissue, skin and breast	14	13
179–189	Malignant neoplasm of genitourinary organs	3	7
190–199	Malignant neoplasm of other and unspecified site	21	29
200–208	Malignant neoplasm of lymphatic and haematopoietic tissue	19	14
239	Unspecified nature	3	2

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Baghdad Visit (9 July 2003)

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women and Equality (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I visited Baghdad on Wednesday 9 July 2003.

The purpose of the visit was to support Iraqi women to become properly involved in the political process and to ensure that British business expertise does not get overlooked in the reconstruction work in Iraq.

I addressed the plenary session of the "Voice of Women of Iraq" conference. This was an important event, organised, run and managed by Iraqi women but with the backing and support of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), especially a secondee to the CPA from my Department's Women and Equality Unit. In addition to speaking at the plenary session, I participated in one of the workshops looking at constitutional and democracy issues, had lunch with the attendees and private discussions with the steering group who had led the conference.

Paula Dobriansky, the Under Secretary for Global Affairs at the US State Department also addressed the conference.

The turnout was impressive in numbers, quality and diversity of participants. This was, of course, only the start of the process of ensuring that women are fully engaged in the reconstruction of Iraq and the political process.

In the afternoon I met with Ambassador Paul Bremer, administrator of the CPA, and pressed him to ensure substantial women's representation on the Governing Council. In the event, only 3 women have actually been appointed to the Council which will be a disappointment to the in-country and exiled Iraq women who had expected and asked for a stronger voice. The UK Government will continue to press for substantial women's representation in future political structures. It will also be important to ensure that those women who are appointed continue to be given support so that they are not marginalised in the political process.

For part of my visit I was joined by a business scoping mission from British Trade International's Iraq Industry Working Group. Together we visited the CPA's Business Support and Facilitation Centre (the brainchild of a UK secondee) and had discussions with senior officials of the Ministries of Industry and Trade about trade and investment promotion and economic reform. We will be following up that visit with offers of further practical support. The Iraqi senior officials were also keen to make use of UK experience and expertise in economic reform and privatisation.

The scoping mission joined me for discussions with US members of the CPA economics team where I was able to press for the interim budget to be finalised. I also discussed the handling of vested/seized assets and the procurement process, and reiterated the need for there to be a level playing field on the role of the private sector in reconstruction. I also used the visit to highlight the value and quality that the UK private sector can bring to Iraq's reconstruction.

In my meeting with Ambassador Bremer, I also discussed the ways in which UK companies might contribute to the reconstruction work in Iraq.

TREASURY

Butterfield Review

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): Further to my written statement to the House on 4 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 40WS, I can announce that today the Government are publishing in full the independent report, its summary and recommendations, of the hon. Mr. Justice Butterfield following the completion of his review.

The Attorney General and I asked Mr. Justice Butterfield to examine the circumstances that led to the termination of the London City Bond (LCB) prosecutions in Liverpool Crown Court on 25 November 2002, the changes in practice within HM Customs and Excise (HMCE) since the time of the cases to which those prosecutions related, and HMCE's compliance with best practice in the use of investigation techniques. The full terms of reference for this review were announced in the written statement I made to the House on 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 9WS. In addition the House will be aware that the Government are looking at the links between law enforcement agencies which investigate serious crime, alongside the review the Chancellor has announced on the future of the tax institutions.

The Government welcome the report, and are grateful to Mr. Justice Butterfield and his team for completing the study so promptly and for the extensive research that underpins his conclusions.

The Review's main findings are:

> that there were major failings in the investigation into and prosecution of the LCB cases, investigated by HMCE from 1995 to 1998;
>
> but that, since then, there have been significant changes, including:
>
> > far-reaching improvements in management, structure and culture within HMCE;
> >
> > changes to the legal framework controlling the regulation of Excise warehouses, which have closed the loopholes used by the criminals in the LCB frauds; and
> >
> > following the Gower/Hammond Review, the separation of responsibility for the conduct of prosecutions from responsibility for the conduct of investigations, by making the Customs and Excise Prosecutions Office

(CEPO) accountable to the Attorney General, and not to the Commissioners of Customs & Excise, since April 2002;

that these changes have gone a long way towards dealing with the problems within HMCE underlying the LCB cases, and Mr Justice Butterfield makes a number of recommendations designed to reinforce this change process.

Mr. Justice Butterfield also identifies three important areas of concern in criminal law and practice highlighted by the LCB cases, all of which have a wider application than HMCE cases. These are:

the use of "abuse of process" in trials as a mechanism for attacking investigation processes;

the challenges investigators and prosecutors face in complex cases in meeting their disclosure obligations under the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996; and

aspects of informant handling.

HMCE Investigation and Prosecution

The Government welcome Mr. Justice Butterfield's conclusion that significant progress has already been made by HMCE in dealing with the issues underlying the failure of the LCB cases, and the unequivocal finding that there is no evidence in the LCB cases of improper enticement or encouragement to commit crimes or of entrapment.

Most importantly, the Government welcome Mr. Justice Butterfield's conclusion that

"HMCE should now put the events of the London City Bond cases behind them and move forward, but not in a spirit of complacency",

and the recommendations he makes on how this process, already substantially underway, can be reinforced.

Mr. Justice Butterfield makes a number of important recommendations that encourage HMCE and the CEPO to continue the programme of reform underway in the department. These recommendations relate to:

HMCE's role as an independent investigating force—the Government accept Mr. Justice Butterfield's finding that, under the current arrangements, HMCE should continue in its present role;

the handling of human intelligence sources—the Government accept these recommendations, and HMCE will promptly implement the new guidelines and procedures which are outlined in the Report;

training for investigators—the Government accept these recommendations, and HMCE will incorporate them into an improved training programme for specialist investigators;

external scrutiny of investigations work—the Government accept the principle of external scrutiny of HMCE investigations work, and HMCE has been asked to undertake a study to identify how additional external scrutiny can best be introduced; and

HMCE's regional structure, and in particular expertise in Scottish law—the Government agree with the analysis in the Review, and has asked HMCE to ensure that proper and informed legal advice is available to Scottish investigators and intelligence officers.

In addition, the Review recognises that CEPO has been revitalised since the Gower/Hammond Review and welcomes the changes that have taken place, in particular the increased independence that followed the transfer of accountability for HMCE's prosecution function to the Attorney General in April 2002. However, Mr. Justice Butterfield draws a number of conclusions, which include recommendations:

that, in order to make its independence from HMCE even more transparent, CEPO should become an entirely separate prosecuting authority accountable to the Attorney General;

that there should be an increase in the number of Investigation Legal Advisers employed within Customs, who play no part in the prosecution process but are available to provide advice to investigators; and

that a more systematic dialogue between HMCE and other Government Departments responsible for related practical and policy issues would be desirable.

The Government strongly agree that the ability of prosecutors to exercise their decision making and other prosecution functions independently should be ensured.

The Government will be considering the full practical implications of these recommendations, and in particular how the independence of the prosecutors in CEPO can best be strengthened further. The Government will provide a detailed response to all these recommendations in the autumn.

Criminal Justice System

The Review concludes that the criminal justice system does not work as effectively as it should, but recognises that some of the problems identified are being addressed in the Criminal Justice Bill currently before Parliament. The Review recommends that consideration is given to:

reforming the operation and rules of the disclosure regime in complex criminal cases;

the power of judges to control proceedings before them relating to abuse of process; and

the operation of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

These recommendations have potential implications across the criminal justice agencies and departments. While accepting that they highlight important areas of concern, the Government will give them further detailed consideration before deciding whether to accept them.

PFI Review

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The Treasury has today published the document "PFI: Meeting the Investment Challenge". Copies are available in the Vote Office and the Library of the House. The Government's objective is to deliver world-class public services. To achieve this, sustained increase in investment and matching reforms are needed to deliver efficient and responsive public services. PFI has an important role to play in delivering this investment. The Government have already significantly increased investment to schools, hospitals, public transport and other public services—total investment in public services now stands at over £40 billion, up from £23 billion in 1997, and it will continue to rise to over £48 billion in 2005-06. While the overwhelming majority of public investment—over 85 per cent—is funded conventionally, PFI has an important role to play in delivering investment in public services.

The document gives a detailed picture of the role of PFI in delivering this investment and presents a rigorous examination of the performance of PFI based on the evidence drawn from research by Her Majesty's Treasury and other bodies, in particular the National Audit Office. This evidence shows that, where it is properly used, PFI has delivered better infrastructure, on time, on budget and to a high standard throughout its life. Of the projects studied almost 90 per cent. were completed on time, and in every case the public sector has paid what it expected to pay. The document also reaffirms the Government's commitment that value for money in PFI projects should not be obtained at the expense of employees' terms and conditions. Drawing on the evidence presented, the document also outlines a series of measures designed to ensure that the public sector effectively captures the value for money benefits that PFI can deliver:

> reforms to improve the assessment of value for money appraisal by the public sector, to continue to ensure there is no bias in favour of any one procurement option and the decisions are made on the basis of best value for money. These include reforms to the Public Sector Comparator to ensure consistency with the reforms made at last year's revision of the "Green Book" (the Treasury's guidance to departments on project appraisal). These changes mean that a value for money assessment of both PFI and conventional procurement options are fully taken into account prior to the procurement of a project, and that there is greater clarity on transferring soft services staff to ensure that application of value for money does not come at the expense of employee terms and conditions;
>
> measures to improve the efficiency of the procurement process, including more rigorous enforcement of standardisation, the accreditation of advisers, new models of procurement and greater transparency;
>
> proposals to revise the scope of PFI and focus its use on where it works best—exploring new applications for PFI where existing evidence suggests it could deliver benefits—as foreshadowed in the Chancellor's Social Market Foundation speech earlier this year—in social housing, urban regeneration and waste, but using conventional procurement methods in areas such as IT and small value projects where experience suggests that conventional methods are the best approach for driving more efficient procurement; and
>
> investigating the potential for new methods of financing projects, for example, through "framework funding" for small PFI schemes bundled together and by piloting the potential for using credit guarantees as an additional means of funding PFI projects.

With over 600 facilities, including 34 major hospitals and over 200 schools, now in operation, and good levels of satisfaction with their performance, this document demonstrates that an intelligent and productive partnership with the private sector can deliver high quality public infrastructure. The reforms set out in the document will help strengthen this partnership for the future.

"Stakeholder" Investment Products

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions are today publishing a Government response to their consultation paper "Proposed Product Specifications for Sandler 'Stakeholder' Products", which was launched on 5 February. It takes forward one of the main recommendations of the Sandler review of July 2002. Copies will be available in the Libraries of the House. The document is also available on the Treasury and Department for Work and Pensions websites.

UK Gilts

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): The Bank of England's Registrar's Department has conducted gilts registration services on behalf of Her Majesty's Treasury to date, but will cease to do so from March 2005. A new service provider will need to be appointed to take its place. In preparing for outsourcing this service, the Government have taken the opportunity to modernise the arrangements for the registration and transfer of gilts. The re-engineered model has now been finalised, taking into account comments received in response to a recent consultation exercise. Details of the model are being deposited in the Libraries of both Houses today.

We plan to put the gilts registration service out to tender over the summer.

Industrial and Provident Societies

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The Strategy Unit report "Private Action, Public Benefit", published in September 2002, highlights some of the key challenges facing the voluntary and not-for-profit sector, and contains a number of recommendations for reform of this sector. Earlier this year the Department of Trade and Industry issued a consultation document on community interest companies, an alternative corporate form in this sector, in response to one of the recommendations in the report. The Government will issue an overall response to the report shortly. The Government now respond to the report's recommendations on industrial and provident societies.

The Government recognise the importance of industrial and provident societies and welcome their tradition of member engagement, contribution to the economy and service to the community. We are working hard to help support this sector to enable it to maximise the benefits it provides to members, the economy and society as a whole.

The Government have closely analysed each of the recommendations in the report and reviewed the responses to the subsequent public consultation on these recommendations. The response to the report will form a significant contribution to the Government's agenda for reform in the industrial and provident society sector. The Government are supportive of the report's recommendations on the industrial and provident society sector. We have accepted in full or in part, six of the seven recommendations in the report. Several of these have already been implemented—either because they represent a continuation of existing policy, or they were taken forward by the 2002 Industrial and Provident Societies Act.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) recently enacted Private Member's Bill gives the Treasury power to bring forward an asset lock-in regime for community benefit societies. Such a regime was a recommendation of this report, and the Treasury is committed to taking it forward. The Government

accept in principle a number of the recommendations, but will undertake further work before deciding how to bring them into effect. These include the recommendations on changing the name of industrial and provident societies to co-operatives and community benefit societies, easing member share capital limits and updating industrial and provident society legislation in line with company law.

We do not accept one of the report's recommendations, on giving co-operatives a statutory definition in line with International Co-operative Alliance Principles. This is because giving co-operatives such a definition would risk restricting the development of this form of industrial and provident society in future.

A detailed analysis to each of the report's recommendations on industrial and provident societies, together with a copy of this statement, is being deposited in the Library of the House and is accessible on the Treasury website http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Building Regulations (Electrical Safety)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Phil Hope): It was announced in a Written Statement on 10 April this year that preliminary analysis of the responses to the consultation on our proposals to introduce a requirement on electrical safety in dwellings into the Building Regulations had received broad support.

Full analysis has confirmed this support and the arguments in the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) show that such an introduction would be beneficial to health and safety in reducing the number of deaths, injuries and fires caused by defective electrical installations in homes. Overall the RIA estimates that there would be a net benefit over the first ten years of £93 million at current prices. The RIA also makes it clear that for the introduction to be successful there would need to be schemes of registered competent installers who would be able to certify that their work was in compliance with all requirements of the Building Regulations. Following the advice of the Building Regulations Advisory Committee, I am therefore pleased to be able to announce that it is our intention to amend the Building Regulations to include a requirement on electrical safety in dwellings as soon as suitable competent person schemes are in place. I wish to do this as soon as possible and therefore urge any body intending to apply to run such a scheme to apply to my Department by 15 October this year.

Making householders aware of the need to protect themselves and their families from incompetent workmanship is in line with our drive for better, safer communities in which to live and work. The new measures will also raise industry standards and contribute towards our overall aim of creating a better-qualified workforce. They reinforce the emphasis in the Fire White Paper published on 30 June of greater prevention of fires.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Remploy

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle):

Remploy's achievement against its targets set by Government for 2002–03

	Target	*Achievement*
Gross Margin the Company will Achieve Gross Margin of £53.7m	£53.7m	£52.7m
Progressions from Remploy Factories to Interwork and to open employment	2,000	2,138
Of which progressions to open employment	1,400	1,610
Unit Cost—operating deficit per disabled worker	£10,173	£11,484
Employee Development Time	5%	5.7%

Remploy will publish its Annual Report and Accounts in the Autumn giving further detail of its peformance throughout 2002–03. Copies of the Annual Report and Accounts will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

In addition, I have, on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, written to the Chairman of Remploy approving the 2003–06 Performance and Resources Framework between the Department and the Company. The Performance and Resources Framework includes targets for the coming year. The agreement has been negotiated by the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. The Targets for 2003–04 are:

a total of 1,650 progressions from Remploy factories or Interwork to mainstream unsupported employment;

Remploy Ltd. will keep within an average cost per supported employee of £10,400;

the Company will achieve a gross margin (sales less cost of materials) figure of £55m;

the Company's Employee Development time will be at least 5 per cent. The full Agreement for 2003–04 will be placed in the Library.

International Labour Organisation Conference 2002

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): The 90th Session of the International Labour Conference 2002 adopted a new protocol to the Occupational Safety and Health Convention 1981 (No. 155) and Recommendation 193 and Recommendation 194 on Promotion of Co-operatives. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today laid before Parliament a White Paper entitled "International Labour Conference, proposed action on one Protocol and two Recommendations adopted at the 90th Session of the International Labour Conference 2002 (Cm 5870)", copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Standards of Decision Making

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's Report on the Standards of Decision Making in the Benefits Agency, Child Support Agency and Employment Service for 2001–02 has been laid before Parliament today (HC 880).

This is the second report under the new decision making and appeals system introduced by the Social Security Act 1998. It covers the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002, the second full year of operation of the new regime. Overall the report shows improvements compared with the previous year. However, some aspects continue to be disappointing, notably overpayment recoverability decisions, but significant remedial steps have been taken in the year since the period of this report to raise standards. Quality decision making is a core element of DWP business and we can assure our customers that raising standards is a priority matter.

HEALTH

Isaacs Report (Government Response)

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): We are publishing today our response to the Isaacs Report, which followed an investigation by Her Majesty's Inspector of Anatomy, Dr Jeremy Metters CB. We advised the House about the publication of the Isaacs Report in a written Ministerial statement on 12 May.

The Inspector's report addressed the case of the late Mr Cyril Mark Isaacs and the retention of his brain for research purposes following a Coroner's post mortem in 1987 without the knowledge or consent of his widow, Mrs Elaine Isaacs. Mr Isaacs's case proved to be part of an arrangement whereby the' coroner's office in north Manchester would identify brains suitable for a research programme at Manchester university. The Inspector also found evidence that brains were used following post mortems on adults in other locations.

The report made 34 specific recommendations that bear on the responsibilities of the Department, the Home Office and the Department for Education and Skills. We have considered these carefully and we are today publishing our joint response and copies have been placed in the Library.

I pay tribute once again to Mrs Elaine Isaacs for bringing her husband's case to public attention and to Dr Metters for his thorough investigation and report. We are very grateful to the Retained Organs Commission and to National Health Service trusts for the arrangements they put in place to deal with inquiries from the public arising from the publication of the report. I understand that the Commission's helpline has taken over 860 calls and, of these, some 580 were specific inquiries about organ retention from a deceased person which are being passed to the relevant NHS trusts for investigation.

While there is still work to be done, the programme of action on the removal, retention and use of human organs and tissue that we have put in hand since we accepted recommendations by the Chief Medical Officer in 2001 has already achieved significant improvements. Following extensive consultation, we published on 25 April a comprehensive, interim framework of guidance and other materials to reflect transparent new systems founded on consent. The interim framework comprises: a statement on the use of human tissue and organs under the current law, a code of practice 'Families and Post-mortems', post-mortem consent forms and leaflets, a code of practice on import/export of human body parts and a summary report on the responses to the consultation document "Human Bodies Human Choices". Steps have also been taken to modernise the practice of pathology and to improve the management of joint NHS and academic posts. In addition, the inquiry findings will be taken into account in the development of relevant policy initiatives bearing on death investigation and coronial services which are currently being taken forward by the Home Office.

We also intend to bring forward legislation establishing a comprehensive new framework for the removal retention and use of organs and tissue from both adults and children as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Medicines Control Agency

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr. Stephen Ladyman): We have received the annual report and accounts of the Medicines Control Agency for 2002–03 which has been laid before Parliament today in accordance with the requirements of sections 5(2) and 5(3) of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1921. Copies have also been placed in the Library.

Medicines Commission

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr. Stephen Ladyman): We have received the annual report of the Medicines Commission for 2002, which has been laid before Parliament today in accordance with the requirements of section 5(2) of the Medicines Act 1968.

Bound volumes have been placed in the Library containing the 2002 reports of the medicines commission, the Committee on Safety of Medicines, the advisory board on the registration of homoeopathic products, the British Pharmacopoeia Commission, the independent review panel on advertising, the independent panel for borderline products and the Veterinary Products Committee.

We are glad to acknowledge the valuable work done by the distinguished members of the Medicines Act advisory bodies and thank them for the time and effort dedicated in the public interest to this important work.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

United States Alien Tort Statute

The Minister for Trade and Investment (Mr. Mike O'Brien): The British Government oppose all unwarranted assertions of extra-territorial jurisdiction in commercial cases. Such assertions infringe on the sovereign right of states to regulate activities within their own territory, interfere with the freedom of states to conduct their own economic policies, place an unwarranted burden on businesses, and can create a climate of uncertainty which may affect the trading and investment conditions of British companies.

A number of cases have been brought under the United States Alien Tort Statute against British companies and others in relation to their activities in third countries. Of particular concern are cases brought in the US against British companies in relation to their activities in South Africa during the Apartheid era, alleging that their presence in South Africa at the time made them complicit in human rights abuses.

The British Government have expressed to the US Government their concerns over the extra-territorial use of the Alien Tort Statute in these commercial cases. The US Government have filed an amicus brief in a related case brought under the Statute, seeking to address this issue among others.

The British Government remain committed to combating impunity for human rights violations wherever they occur. We believe that the most effective means of achieving this goal is the strengthening and developing of credible national justice mechanisms that conform to international human rights standards. We believe that, in the first instance, legal remedies in the country where the act allegedly took place should be exhausted. In the Apartheid cases this does not appear to have happened. Moreover, South Africa is engaged in an ongoing post-Apartheid reconciliation process, the complexities of which should not be under-estimated. We believe that the South African Government are best placed and best capable of dealing with the issue of reparations for crimes under Apartheid.

TRANSPORT

Transport for London

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Tony McNulty): I have today placed a list in the Libraries of both Houses, which details all the major land assets that Transport for London inherited from London Regional Transport today.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Draft Gambling Bill

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I have today published for consultation a set of draft clauses that we intend to be part of a wider Gambling Bill.

The Bill will make major changes to the way in which gambling is regulated and controlled in Great Britain. It will build on the work undertaken by Sir Alan Budd and the Gambling Review Body that he led.

It is based on the three key principles.

First, the principle that the system of gambling law and regulation must keep the gambling industry free of crime. Our industry has a high international reputation for integrity, which must not be put at risk.

Second, the law must ensure that gambling is conducted fairly, so that players know what to expect.

Third, there must be effective protection for children and the vulnerable.

The controls we have on gambling today date from the 1960s and 1970s. They have served us well, but have failed to keep up with society's attitudes to gambling and developments in technology and the leisure industries. They need to be modernised.

But modernisation must not be allowed to generate an upsurge in problem gambling. I am determined that we will maintain the highest standards of social responsibility.

Sir Alan recommended the establishment of a new national regulator for all forms of gambling. It was proposed that this regulator, the Gambling Commission, should license gambling operators and key individuals involved in the provision of gambling, and that local authorities should license gambling premises.

In A Safe Bet for Success (published in March 2002, Cmnd 5397) we accepted the vast majority of the Gambling Review's recommendations. We have been working closely with the interested industries, representatives of groups encouraging responsible gambling, local authorities, consumer groups, other Government Departments and the devolved administrations to prepare draft legislation that would give effect to this new system of regulation, which will be centred on the creation of a new national regulator—the Gambling Commission.

The proposals published today allow for the establishment of a Gambling Commission, transforming the Gaming Board for Great Britain into a new body with wider functions, greater flexibility to act and stronger enforcement powers.

The clauses describe the three purposes of gambling regulation, which will guide the work of the Commission.

They outline the ways in which the Commission will be able to use codes of practice to ensure best practice across each sector of the gambling industry. Codes of practice issued by the Commission will be an important feature of the new legislation, giving the regulator more flexibility to respond to changing circumstances that may raise issues of consumer protection or threats to vulnerable people.

The draft Bill goes on to describe the principal function of the Gambling Commission—the licensing of gambling operations and key personnel. The Commission will have flexibility to impose licence

conditions on categories of licences and, where necessary, on specific operators. It will also have powers to review licences where it believes conditions have been breached or where there is some other threat to the three objectives of regulation.

Local authorities are to be responsible for the licensing of gambling premises. Details of these proposals will be published later this year.

The Government remain committed also to the sale of the Totalisator Board and the abolition of the Horserace Betting Levy Board. We will bring forward legislation to achieve these objectives as soon as parliamentary time becomes available. Should parliamentary time become available prior to the introduction of a Gambling Bill, we will leave open the option of pursuing our horseracing proposals in a smaller, separate measure.

I understand that a Joint Committee of both Houses is to be convened to examine the Government's draft proposals. The draft Gambling Bill is precisely the sort of legislation, cutting across party lines but with some potential for controversy, that will benefit from pre-legislative scrutiny by both Houses. Such scrutiny will improve the legislation and build parliamentary understanding and public confidence, enabling us to strike the right balance between deregulation and the protection of young and vulnerable people.

The text of the publication can be found at www.culture.gov.uk

I will publish the draft Bill in full later this year.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts 2002–03

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): The Prison Service's latest annual report and accounts, setting out the service's performance during 2002–03 is published today and copies have been placed in the Library.

Youth Justice Board Annual Report

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): The Youth Justice Board's annual review for 2002–03 has today been laid before Parliament. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The Youth Justice Board for England & Wales is an executive non-departmental public body established under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to monitor the operation and performance of the youth justice system and to identify and disseminate good practice to prevent offending by children and young people. Since April 2000, the Board has been responsible for commissioning services for young people under 18 who are sentenced and remanded to secure facilities.

The Annual Review for 2002–03 reports on the continuing progress in implementing reforms to the youth justice system including a successful reduction in juvenile non-custodial reconviction rates and the continuing delivery of the Government's pledge to halve the time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders.

The review outlines a year in which new orders and programmes have been successfully introduced most notably the extension of Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programmes to 80 per cent. national coverage (ISSPs) targeting persistent and serious offenders and the nationwide roll-out of referral orders and youth offender panels for offenders convicted for the first time.

Independent Review of the National Asylum Support Service

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I am pleased to inform the House that I have today published the key findings from the report of the independent review of the operation of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). The review was established in March this year to consider the ways in which NASS operates and provide me with recommendations to improve its performance. I am grateful to the review team for the work they have undertaken. The review team found that NASS was established to undertake a much simpler role than the complex one which they now perform. That role is made even more complicated by being a very visible part of the asylum system. Despite that, the review team found that NASS was showing signs of improvement in its operational performance, strategic planning and relationships with partner organisations.

However, they also found that some key issues still need to be addressed. They found that NASS had faced real difficulties in getting on top of its job. External pressures such as Sangatte, an upsurge in asylum applications in 2001 and significant ongoing recruitment and training gaps contributed significantly to NASS's current problems and it had failed to establish a clear strategy to provide purpose, direction and governance of its activities. It had been established as a distinct part of the Immigration and Nationality Department, something which had contributed to a lack of proper integration with other parts of the asylum process and unrealistic expectations surrounding issues such as social integration.

The review team found that there were still considerable gaps in NASS's ability to deal effectively with its external partners such as local authorities or the voluntary sector. Partly, this was a lack of understanding of the roles of these other organisations, but also a simple lack of effective and agreed processes to ensure that issues ran smoothly. The review team also found weaknesses within some of NASS's core operations. IT was critical to the business but was neither fully exploited, nor was it properly integrated with the IT used elsewhere in IND. The Review Team said that specific improvements to processes or resolution of long-standing policy impasses were possible which would provide much needed service improvements. The basic customer service provided to NASS's wide range of stakeholders needed to improve. Within this were concerns such as the difficulties with telephone contact with NASS. The review team supported NASS's regionalisation project and pointed

to a need for many more aspects of NASS's business to be handled at a local level. Looking across the range of issues covered, the review team said that for NASS to perform at its best it needs to:

> be clear what is expected of it and how its success will be judged;
>
> have the financial and managerial resources to do the job;
>
> have a thorough understanding of its own strengths and weaknesses;
>
> have a clear view of what it needs to do to improve its performance;
>
> understand its impact on the whole end to end asylum process;
>
> sort out some of its key business processes and procedures;
>
> get better at working with the rest of IND in a fully joined up operation.

Since completion of the review NASS's senior management team has been strengthened, as has the Immigration and Nationality Department's ability to deal more effectively with social integration issues. More widely, NASS and other IND staff are currently analysing the proposals contained in the report and will submit an action plan to me shortly. This action plan will form the basis of a major programme of work designed to improve NASS's performance. I shall make a further statement about the action taken in the light of the review in due course.

Firearms Amnesty

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Caroline Flint): I have today placed in the Libraries of both Houses details of what was handed in to police forces during the recent firearms amnesty (31 March to 30 April).

A total of 43,908 guns and 1,039,358 rounds of ammunition were handed in. This compares to 22,939 guns and 695,197 rounds of ammunition during the previous amnesty in June 1996.

I am particularly pleased to see the high volume of hand-ins of all types of gun and ammunition. The amnesty was a great success and these items are no longer at risk of falling into the hands of criminals.

The guns figure includes 6,529 prohibited firearms (including 5,734 handguns), 10,513 shot guns, 13,974 air weapons, 9,480 imitations and 3,412 assorted rifles and other guns. In addition, a total of 7,093 other weapons, including knives, swords and crossbows, were handed in.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I am pleased to announce the publication of the independent Complaints Audit Committee (CAC) annual report for 2002–03. Copies are available in the Library of the House and on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's website.

This is the CAC's 9th annual report. Their role is to monitor the effectiveness of IND's procedures for investigating formal complaints about the conduct and efficiency of staff in IND. Their findings are a very valuable contribution to the process of continuous improvement within IND.

The annual report highlights a number of areas where IND could improve, together with useful recommendations. IND will use these recommendations to help inform their wider change and reform strategy, one of the key elements of which is to make it a more customer-focused organisation.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 16 July 2003

DEFENCE

Queen Victoria School

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): The Chief Executive of the Queen Victoria School has been set the following Key Targets for 2003–04:

PUPIL POPULATION

To maintain the staying on rate at School for S4 to S5 at a minimum of 4 per cent. above the Scottish national average for the current year.*

EDUCATIONAL

To maintain a percentage of pupils of the S4 roll gaining 5 + awards at level 5 or better (post-appeal) by the end of S4, at 2 per cent. above the Scottish national average.*

To maintain a percentage of the S4 roll gaining 3+ awards at Level 6 or better (post-appeal) by the end of S5, at least equal to the Scottish national average.*

FINANCIAL

To achieve a pupil per capita cost of not more than £15,250 by 31 March 2004. The 2002–03 target was £14,000.

To generate gross income to the School of at least £300,000 by 31 March 2004. The 2002–03 target was £295,000.

*All Queen Victoria School statistics to be based on the School's results over the last three years, compared with the Scottish national average for the current year, those statistics being as published in the Scottish Executive Statistical Bulletin.

Sponsored Reserves

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): On 14 April 2003 a contract was signed between SERCo Aerospace and the RAF for the provision of Sponsored Reserves (contract support personnel who may be called out for service). SERCo Aerospace is a commercial company contracted to provide engineering support to the BAe 125 aircraft of the Comms Fleet, 32 (The Royal) Squadron, based at RAF Northolt. The new arrangement enables personnel to be deployed to an operational theatre with the protection of reserve status. Individual voluntary contracts have been signed and four personnel have been issued with call-out notices to deploy overseas.

The use of Sponsored Reserves is designed to cover specialist support roles where the call-out is not dependent on a level of crisis. Delegation of call-out powers has been authorised to the Air Secretary and authorised officers on his staff, in the same way as for other Sponsored Reserves. Call-out notices are served routinely every few weeks under existing delegated powers, and there are currently other Sponsored Reservists under contract with the Royal Navy as well as with the RAF. Naval Sponsored Reserves exist as part of the Strategic Sealift project, as well as providing hydrographic support to Survey vessels, and RAF Sponsored Reserves have signed agreements with the Mobile Meteorological Unit.

The Duke of York's Royal Military School

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): The Chief Executive of the Duke of York's Royal Military School has been set the following Key Targets for 2003–04:

To achieve 97.80 per cent. of 15 year old pupils gaining 5 or more passes graded A* to C at GCSE.

To achieve 25.20 per cent. of GCSE passes at grades A* or A.

To achieve an average GCSE points score per 15 year old pupil of 58.30.

To achieve an average GCE points score per candidate of 255.

To achieve 35.80 per cent. of GCE passes at grades A or B.

To achieve a pupil per capita cost of no more than £12,542.

To generate income of at least £700,000.

To achieve at least 300 applications for September 2004 intake.

Iraq

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): United Kingdom forces continue to make good progress in helping Iraq become a stable and united state.

The vast majority of Iraqis welcomed the fall of the Saddam regime. The newly formed Governing Council has given Iraqis a representative voice after decades of oppression. The Coalition will work with the Governing Council to rebuild Iraq. It will hand over to an elected government as soon as possible. The UK is playing a major role, and has seconded experts to work in the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad in a wide range of fields: political, financial, legal, security, health, education, roads, forensics, war crimes, prisons, culture and communications. We are also assisting in the training of a new Iraqi Army and the Iraqi police.

Since the collapse of the former regime, and the announcement of the end of decisive combat operations on 1 May, the Coalition's main effort has been directed towards establishing a safe and secure Iraq. Security is an essential part of the political and economic rehabilitation of the country, and Coalition stabilisation operations continue. Those who violently oppose the Coalition represent a desperate minority. In the south, UK forces have developed close links with local communities, and have helped to improve the availability of water, food, power and medical supplies, which had previously been used as a means of control by Saddam Hussein. Iraqis are making the most of their new freedoms. However, the security environment remains difficult in places, particularly in Baghdad and the surrounding area. We are assisting our Coalition allies in a number of ways, including sharing British expertise in urban operations, derived from many years experience in Northern Ireland and the Balkans.

The roulement of UK forces set out in my Written Statement of 11 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 51–52WS, continues. Today, about 11,000 UK servicemen and women drawn from all three Services

remain in the Gulf region and Iraq. The deployment of 3 (UK) Division, 19 Mechanised Brigade and 101 Logistic Brigade is nearing completion. The Royal Navy is maintaining a presence of five vessels in the Gulf. The Joint Helicopter Force of 18 helicopters based at Basra continues to support forces on the ground. We are considering the scope for rear-basing two RAF Tornado GR4 in the UK, leaving six in theatre with a number of supporting aircraft, in line with the reduced requirement for sorties.

UK forces are already working closely with military contingents from a number of countries, and further forces are due to deploy over the coming weeks. Headquarters 3 (UK) Division formally took over command of the Multinational Division (South East) (MND(SE)) on 12 July. This division is now responsible for Coalition forces in four provinces in Southern Iraq, namely Al Basrah, Maysan, Dhi Qar and Al Muthanna. Nine countries have committed troops, and discussions continue with a number of others. When fully assembled, non-UK multinational contributions to MND(SE) should total some 5,500 military personnel.

In Al Basrah province, a Czech Field Hospital and a company of military police, over 300 Czech personnel in all, will be attached to Headquarters MND(SE). The Czech Field Hospital has been doing valuable work in Iraq since May. 38 Engineer Regiment of 19 Mechanised Brigade will work alongside a 140-strong Norwegian company in the Al Basrah and Maysan provinces. We also expect the deployment of around 40 New Zealand engineers with a small support staff for humanitarian and reconstruction tasks. Also in Maysan province, a Danish battlegroup of some 450 personnel including a 30-strong Lithuanian contingent has for some weeks been operating out of Al Qurnah. In Al Muthanna province, a 1,100-strong Dutch battlegroup comprising a Marine battalion, engineer company, medical facility and a military police platoon, will be based in As Samawah. In addition, three Dutch Chinook helicopters will be deployed to Tallil. The Italian mechanised brigade in Dhi Qar province will be 2,800 strong, and will be supported by a Romanian mechanised battalion and military police company (520 personnel), and a 130-strong security force company of Portuguese National Guard in a policing role. These contributions to MND(SE) represent a powerful symbol of the international community's commitment to the future of Iraq.

The rotation of the UK divisional headquarters, the deployment of international contingents, and the inception of MND(SE) makes this an appropriate juncture to take stock of planned force levels. This process is continuing. If necessary, we will make further adjustments to our deployed forces. We remain committed to maintaining appropriate forces in Iraq for as long as necessary and no longer.

Armed Forces Initial Training

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): On 10 February 2003 I published the report of an appraisal of the care of recruits in initial training, carried out by an independent team. Today I am publishing the report of a follow-up appraisal carried out by the same team, which has continued to monitor progress, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

The overall assessment arrived at by the re-appraisal is that the initial training system is proving highly successful in continuing to deliver a large number of high quality, motivated young people for service in the armed forces, most recently in the very demanding combat and environmental conditions of the Gulf. All three services' training organisations, however, are still very tautly resourced, notably in the area of supervisory and instructional manpower, for their very high throughput of trainees. The most significant risks are carried in the larger army training establishments. The team concludes that a good deal has been done, but that further progress will require additional investment of manpower and resources.

Alongside the re-appraisal report, I am publishing a Departmental progress report, which provides an overview of the action we have taken since February. A wide range of measures has been set in hand to improve processes and procedures, in line with the recommendations of the first appraisal report. These have included work to identify the resource implications of the recommendations. One of the most significant criticisms in February was of inadequate numbers of instructors, especially at some of the large army training establishments. The army has identified a requirement for additional instructors and support staff—106 of these vacancies were assessed as urgent; most have been filled already, and all will be filled by 11 August. This is a significant achievement on the army's part, at a time of major operational commitment overseas, and reflects the very high priority that the army puts on the initial training and care of its soldiers.

Inevitably, however, as the re-appraisal indicates, it takes time for all the policy changes that we are putting in place to be implemented, especially where extra resources or new infrastructure is required. As the re-appraisal notes, the increased numbers of instructors and supervisory staff are still building up. They and other improvements we are putting in place, have the potential to significantly improve the training environment. But we are certainly not complacent and recognise that progress must be maintained and extended. In line with the latest recommendation of the team, we will carry out a further assessment of progress in summer 2004.

HEALTH

Medical Devices Agency

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Miss Melanie Johnson): The 2002–03 report and accounts of the Medical Devices Agency have today been laid before the House of Commons pursuant to section 7 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Surveillance Unit

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Miss Melanie Johnson): The National Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease surveillance unit's 11th

annual report has been published today. The report documents the unit's findings in relation to sporadic, familial and iatrogenic Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD), and also variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD), up to 31 January 2003. Copies have been placed in the Library, and are also available on the Unit's web site at http://www.cjd.ed.ac.uk/.

Clinical Trials Directive

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Miss Melanie Johnson): The draft regulations to transpose the clinical trials directive into domestic law are currently being discussed with stakeholders. The process of developing these regulations fully, at which point they can be laid before Parliament, should therefore be completed some time after Parliament reconvenes in October. I will aim to give a further update at around that time. Member States are required to implement the directive fully by 1 May 2004.

NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): The National Health Service Purchasing and Supply Agency's annual report and accounts 2002–03 have today been laid before the House of Commons pursuant to section 7 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000.

Copies have been placed in the Library.

NHS Estates and Facilities Management Development Agency

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): We have received the NHS Estates and Facilities Management Development Agency's annual report and accounts 2002–03, and copies have today been laid before Parliament in accordance with the requirements of section 5 of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1921. Copies have been placed in the Library.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Criminal Justice

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): Technical notes for the remaining shared Criminal Justice System Public Service Agreement (CJS PSA) targets for the 2002 Spending Review period, have been published today. Copies are available in the Library and online at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/inside/aims/index.html.

In common with those for other targets, the technical notes define the terms used in the PSA targets, their territorial scope, measurement systems which will be used, and criteria for success. The purpose of the technical notes is to enable Parliament, and the public, to judge progress against the PSA targets. The measurement systems will be used by the three CJS departments to manage delivery of the new, challenging targets.

The majority of the CJS technical notes were presented to Parliament, as part of the Home Office technical notes, on 25 March 2003. The remaining technical notes, published today, relate to the targets *(i)* to improve public confidence in the CJS, and *(ii)* to increase value for money in the CJS. For convenience, the Home Office technical notes document has been republished to incorporate the revised public confidence technical note. The CJS Value for money technical note has been published as a separate document.

The Criminal Justice System PSA targets were presented to Parliament on 15 July 2002 as part of the Command Paper "2002 Spending Review: Public Service Agreements" (Cm 5571).

Nationality, Immigration and Asylum

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of the official consultation process report following the public consultation exercise on the implementation of sections 134–139 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. These provisions will enable the immigration authorities to require employers and financial institutions to provide information in respect of specified individuals who are reasonably suspected of committing certain immigration offences. Their purpose is to strengthen our ability to deal with illegal working and fraud against the national asylum support arrangements. The new powers are closely drawn and are modelled on existing powers in social security legislation. A consultation paper seeking views on practical questions concerning the operation of the new powers was published on 19 March. The consultation process report summarises the comments received and our response. The new powers will come into force on 30 July, together with section 129 of the 2002 Act relating to the supply of information by local authorities.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Fire Authority

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): The Report on Stage Two of the Quinquennial Review of the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland has been completed and made available in the House of Commons Library and on the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's web site.

The conclusion of the Stage One Report, published on 3 February, was that the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland should remain in being as an NDPB.

Stage Two examined how the Authority operated and related to the Fire Brigade and its sponsoring Department. The consultants invited views from a range of respondents, including Authority members and personnel, the fire fighters' unions, and representatives of local government in Northern Ireland. Their report makes recommendations to improve the Authority's effectiveness and efficiency.

The Report's overall conclusion is that the Fire Authority has already begun to address effectively the problems identified in the Stage One Report. In particular, relations between Authority members and senior officers have improved significantly since last year.

The Report recommends:

A more strategic role for the Authority Board.

A more compact Board.

A new senior management structure, with greater emphasis on the personnel and financial management functions.

The Stage 2 Report comes at a good time, when a major programme of change is under way across the UK in how our fire and rescue services are organised and delivered. The recommendations in the Report will help the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland to build on the positive start that it has already made, and to address the challenges of change with confidence and enthusiasm.

The proposed changes in the composition of the Authority would require legislation. I intend to include them in a paper for public consultation, which I plan to publish later this year. That paper will also outline the Government's vision for the future development of the Fire and Rescue Service in Northern Ireland in light of the broad policy approach outlined by the Deputy Prime Minister in his Statement to the House of 30 June, tailored to Northern Ireland's particular needs and circumstances.

Police Ombudsman

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): The Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland's annual report for 2002–03 is published today.

Copies will be available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Life Sentence Review Commissioners

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): I have today arranged for the Annual Report of the Life Sentence Review Commissioners to be laid in the House. Copies have also been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. This document will not be published but will instead be made available on the Commissioners' website at http://www.lsrcni.org.uk/.

Train Dérailment

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. John Spellar): The report of the inquiry carried out by an Inspector of Her Majesty's railway inspectorate into a train derailment in County Londonderry on 4 June 2002 is being published today. Copies of the inspector's report have been placed in the Libraries of the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Northern Ireland Assembly and copies will be made available to the public on request. I have also placed copies of the Northern Ireland Railways internal report on this incident in the Libraries and copies will also be available to the public from Translink on request. The HMRI report will also be placed on the Department for Regional Development's website http://www.drdni.gov.uk/transportpolicy/

The derailment occurred when the 12.50 pm train from Londonderry to Belfast hit a large rock that came to rest on the railway track following a rock fall from an adjacent cliff at Downhill, County Londonderry. Thankfully there were no fatalities and only the driver of the train suffered injuries that were sufficiently serious to require admission to hospital. Following the accident, Mr Peter Robinson MP, the then Minister for Regional Development, made a statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 10 June 2002 advising that he had asked HMRI to conduct an investigation into the circumstances of the accident, to report the findings and to make recommendations.

The report comes to a number of conclusions about the operations of Northern Ireland Railways that were a contributory factor to the accident and makes recommendations for improvements. It also contains conclusions and recommendations in respect of the Department for Regional Development's Roads Service, the Department of the Environment's Planning Service, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and other duty holders. The report concludes that rock falls from the cliffs at Downhill were foreseeable, that further rock falls will occur, and that these pose a risk to residents and, to a lesser extent road and rail users.

The conclusions and recommendations contained in the report are actively being considered for implementation by the relevant agencies in Northern Ireland. I will ensure that these bodies liaise closely with each other in this process. I have taken action to ensure that the recommendations are actively considered for implementation.

I wish to express my appreciation to HMRI for their assistance and in particular to the inspector, Mr Gerald Kerr, for his detailed and careful examination of the issues and for his recommendations. I also wish to commend the public spiritedness of the eyewitness to the rock fall who contacted the emergency services and the residents of Downhill for the assistance they gave to the injured.

Castlereagh Break-in

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): On 20 March 2002 my predecessor announced that he had launched an inquiry into the implications of the break-in at the Special Branch office in Castlereagh on 17 March. He informed the House that, in parallel with the criminal investigation that was under way, he had established a review to determine how the incident could have happened, to assess the extent of any damage caused to national security, to audit the measures taken in response to the incident and to identify any wider lessons on national security. The review was conducted by Sir John Chilcot, assisted by Mr Colin Smith.

I very recently took receipt of Sir John's report. I should like to express my gratitude to Sir John and Colin Smith for producing a comprehensive report that provides a solid basis on which to move forward.

I have today written to the Chief Constable, the Chairman of the Policing Board and the Chief Surveillance Commissioner with an account of the report's findings on matters which fall to their direct responsibility.

My predecessor commissioned the review in recognition of his responsibility for national security issues. In identifying weaknesses in national security arrangements exposed by the break-in, this report makes a number of observations and recommendations.

There has, over the months, been a significant degree of speculation about who might have been involved in this incident, including allegations of collusion. I can confirm that the review did not uncover any evidence whatsoever that members of Government agencies were in any way involved in this incident, although the police investigation is continuing. The review was also able to provide a satisfactory assurance about the quality of the police investigation, confirming the conclusions of a separate review of the professional quality and standard of the investigation, carried out by the Metropolitan Police Service last year at the request of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

The report came to certain conclusions about how the incident might have occurred and made recommendations about how to avoid any similar incidents happening in the future. I am sure that the House will recognise that I am constrained by the wider aspects and implications of national security from going into any details on these matters. But I shall be considering the matters raised in the report with the greatest care.

Military Complaints Procedures

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): I have today arranged for copies of Jim McDonald's annual report for 2002 to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The report of the independent assessor continues to provide valuable reassurance to both the public and the Government that the army's complaints procedures stand scrutiny. I welcome Mr. McDonald's report and I will consider it carefully. I will respond as soon as possible.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Serious Fraud Office

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): The Serious Fraud Office Annual Report 2002–03 has today been published and laid before Parliament. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Local Government Finance

The Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Fire (Mr. Nick Raynsford): Following a commitment in the 2001 Local Government White Paper, we are carrying out a wide-ranging review of the balance between central and local sources of funding for local government in England. This review is being steered by a high level group, chaired by me, which includes senior representatives of central and local government as well business, the unions, the academic world and the accountancy profession.

To inform the work of the group I am today issuing an invitation to all those interested to submit comments by 30 September. Copies of the invitation letter will be available in the Libraries of both Houses, the Vote Office and on the website of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

TRANSPORT

Aerodromes

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Tony McNulty): I have today laid before Parliament The Aerodromes (Noise Restrictions) (Rules and Procedures) Regulations 2003, which will come into force on 6 August 2003.

The Regulations transpose into UK law Directive 2002/30/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 March 2002 on the establishment of rules and procedures with regard to the introduction of noise-related operating restrictions at Community airports. The Directive replaces the Hushkits Regulation (EC925/1999—which introduced a blanket ban on the noisiest aircraft types).

The Directive and the new Regulations:

- are designed to ensure that consistent procedures governing the introduction of new noise-related operating restrictions at airports are established across the European Union.
- will initially apply to the following airports:
  - Birmingham
  - Edinburgh
  - Glasgow
  - London Gatwick
  - London Heathrow
  - London Luton
  - London Stansted
  - Manchester
  - London City
  - Belfast City
- do not require action to counter noise to be taken but set out a process that must be followed where such action is being contemplated;
- put in place a framework within which a "balanced approach" to managing aircraft noise can be implemented on an airport-by-airport basis.

The balanced approach comprises four equally important elements:

- reducing noise at source (taking account of the effect of existing and foreseeable noise standards for engines);
- using operational noise abatement procedures (in other words, flying aircraft as quietly as possible, consistent with safe operation);
- using land-use planning and management policies to prevent or limit noise sensitive development around airports;
- restricting, and in extremis banning, aircraft from operating ("operating restrictions"). If banning noisiest aircraft at non-City airports is contemplated it is limited to those that meet the present International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) noise limitation standard ("Chapter 3") by a margin of 5dB or less. City Airports may impose

more stringent bans provided that they do not affect aircraft which comply with the ICAO "Chapter 4" noise standards.

The Department for Transport undertook a consultation with UK stakeholders between 31 July—31 October 2002 on those aspects of implementation of the Directive in the UK over which there was flexibility. A Summary of Responses to the Consultation and the Government's view on the issues raised by the responses has been placed in the Library of the House.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Water Framework Directive

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): The Government intend to publish a third consultation paper on the water framework directive at the end of July or early August.

This third consultation will contain proposed draft transposing regulations, a revised regulatory impact assessment and a summary of responses to the second consultation paper with the Government's response.

Rights of Way (Crime Prevention)

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): I will shortly announce which areas the Government will include in the first designation order under section 118B of the Highways Act 1980 to enable highway authorities to make orders to close or divert rights of way to prevent crime.

I shall write to each of the 15 authorities who applied for designation letting them know whether their applications have been successful and inviting those who have not been successful to provide more evidence. Defra will issue a press release to coincide with this and I will write to those MPs whose constituencies are directed affected to let them know what has been decided.

The legislation provides the Secretary of State with discretion to designate areas for the purposes of preventing or reducing crime that would otherwise disrupt the life of the community. Local highway authorities are then able to make orders to close or divert individual rights of way that are affected by high levels of crime.

The guidance that Defra issued to local authorities in February this year (Circular 1/2003) stated that whilst all applications for designation would be considered, the Government generally believed that a primary consideration must be that highway authorities were able to demonstrate that:

> there are rights of way in the area in question that are demonstrable causes of a persistent crime problem; and
>
> the realistic alternative options to tackle the causes of problems have been examined, prior to the application being made.

In reaching decisions, we have considered, in consultation with the Home Office, whether these two tests have been met.

The quality and quantity of information accompanying applications varied considerably. I plan to include in the designation order those areas for which the applications generally reflected the requirements of the guidance and where the authority provided evidence of a link between the crime which is occurring and the right of way, such as a statement by the police or Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, backed up by statistics wherever possible.

Applications which do not include the information set out in the guidance and do not contain sufficient evidence of a link will be deferred. Decisions on these will be deferred until October to enable authorities to provide additional information over the summer to support their applications. We will be making contact with each of these authorities individually to tell them what additional information is needed. One or two of those who are now being deferred were invited to submit additional information or evidence but failed to do so and I hope that such invitations will then be taken seriously in the future.

The designation order will be subject to the negative resolution procedure and will be laid in August so that authorities can begin to use their new powers as soon as possible.

It remains our view that, in general, rights of way do not cause or facilitate crime, but that we need to act vigorously where there is a connection. Their existence is frustrating attempts to deal with serious crime the Government will give local authorities the power to tackle.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Student Finance

The Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education (Alan Johnson): The House will know that following the publication of *The Future of Higher Education* White Paper, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced that we would be reviewing the income threshold below which a student would be eligible to the new Higher Education Grant.

I am pleased to be able to inform the House that the upper income threshold for receiving the full £1,000 grant will be £15,200. Those with incomes of between £15,201 and £21,185 will get a partial grant through a taper scheme. Based on the current student cohort we estimate about 30 per cent. of English and Welsh students will benefit from the full grant when it is introduced in the 2004–05 academic year. Approximately a further 10 per cent. of students should benefit from a partial grant.

I can also provide details of the new package of support for part-time HE students.

Eligible students will be entitled to a fee grant, capped at the equivalent of 50 per cent. of the full-time fee grant rate: in 2004–05 we estimate this will be £575. They will also be entitled to a grant of £250 for course costs.

Both grants will be available to those on low incomes who are studying at least the equivalent of 50 per cent. of a full-time course. Entitlement will be via a simple means test. Students who are on certain benefits would automatically qualify for full support.

In 2004–05 the income threshold will be set at £14,600. Those with incomes of between £14,600 and £21,487 will get partial support through a taper scheme.

Students will be entitled to support for a maximum of eight years depending on course length, rather than six years as is currently the case with loans for part-time study.

TREASURY

Approved Share Schemes (Armed Forces Reservists)

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The Inland Revenue will publish today an Extra Statutory Concession (ESC) to enable employers of armed forces reservists who participate in an Inland Revenue approved employee share scheme, to take action to maintain the reservist's participation in the scheme, for the period they are away on active service.

The ESC will treat the employment with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) as fulfilling the employment conditions for Inland Revenue approved employee share schemes and Enterprise Management Incentive.

By concession, employers and scheme providers will also be allowed to take such action as is necessary to maintain a reservist's participation in an approved employee share scheme for the period they are away serving with the MOD, and this action will not compromise the approval of the scheme.

The ESC applies from 7 January 2003, the date the first call up order was issued by the Secretary of State for Defence.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

High Court Enforcement

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. David Lammy): I have today published a consultation paper detailing proposals for a new system for High Court writ enforcement, *High Court Enforcement—The Enforcement Review: Writs of Fieri Facias and Possession*. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): The thirteenth Report on the implementation of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong was published today and copies have been placed in the Library of the House. A copy of the Report is also available on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website http://www.fco.gov.uk/. The Report includes a foreword by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. I commend the Report to the House.

Cayman Islands

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): Following an open competition, Mr. Sam Bulgin has been appointed as the new Attorney-General for the Cayman Islands. He is currently the Cayman Islands' Solicitor-General, and has been acting as Attorney-General since the early departure of David Ballantyne in March 2003.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Science, Engineering and Technology

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I am happy to inform the House that I am today publishing the latest edition of the *Forward Look* of Government-funded science, engineering and technology (SET). The Forward Look is the Government's publication of Government-funded SET and R&D expenditure data compiled by the Office for National Statistics. Forward Look highlights the outcome of the latest spending review as well as historical trends in government expenditure.

The theme for *Forward Look 2003* is "making a difference". Entries from departments, Research Councils, learned bodies and devolved administrations set out to explain, with examples of tangible outcomes, how SET is helping them deliver policy and public services in their priority areas.

Forward Look 2003 also aims to illustrate how the economy and society can benefit from science and technology, as we explore new areas of science and look for ways of exploiting technology. It helps Government in its efforts to engage the public in a meaningful way to learn about and express their views about the possible directions of science and its impacts on society. *Forward Look 2003* will be of value to all of us interested in science, and government-funded research and science policy in particular. The accompanying tables provide an authoritative reference point to where government research spending has been going, what it is being used to achieve and where future spending is to be focused.

Forward Look 2003 shows that there has been a further substantial increase in the overall Science Budget as a result of the 2002 Spending Review, with the Research Councils receiving new funding to increase the volume of top quality research and to take forward specific new projects.

Forward Look 2003 sets out in detail how the Government's significant investment in science is being spent. Funding for science, engineering and technology is increasing from £8.46 billion in 2002–03 to £8.61 billion in 2004–05 in real terms. In particular we are focusing on investing in our excellent science base, because cutting edge science is at the heart of a successful economy.

Copies of *Forward Look 2003* have been placed in the Library of the House and have also been sent to the Clerks of both the Commons and Lords Science and Technology Committees.

Low Pay Commission

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe): I am pleased to announce that we have today given the Low Pay Commission new terms of reference. The Government has asked the Commission to consider whether the October 2004 upratings of the minimum wage recommended in their fourth report remain appropriate in the light of economic circumstances, and to consider the possible advantages and disadvantages of a minimum wage rate for 16 to 17 year old workers. The Commission has been asked to report to the Government by the end of February 2004. Copies of the terms of reference have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Government Payment Performance

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): The overall payment performance of Government is 94.83 per cent. Figures for the financial year 2002–03 show that there has been a slight decrease in overall performance this year. However, there has been a continued improvement in the payment performance of a number of Departments and agencies, with 59 per cent., achieving the average and 19 per cent., paying 99 per cent. or more of their invoices on time.

Government Departments and their agencies are required to monitor their payment performance and to publish the results in their departmental or annual reports. The table lists, by Department, the proportion of bills paid within 30 days, or other agreed credit period, of receipt of a valid invoice.

The Government take this issue very seriously, and are committed to improving the payment culture in the UK, in order to create fair and stable business transactions. The Government's own payment performance is an important element in this policy.

Main Departments	*2002–03 Paid on Time %*
Ministry of Defence	100
Privy Council Office	100
Office of Water Services	99.72
Inland Revenue	99.35
Land Registry	99.21
Office of Telecommunications	99.21
Government Actuary's Department	99.17
Public Records Office	99.17
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	99.09
Health and Safety Executive	98.95
Export Credit Guarantee Department	98.76
Charity Commission	98.24
HM Customs and Excise	98.13
Treasury Solicitors Department	98.13
Office for National Statistics	97.97
Electoral Commission	97.84
Ordnance Survey	97.53
Department of Trade and Industry	97.2
Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioners	96.88
Forestry Commission	96.75
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	96.72
Department for International Development	96.52
Office of Government Commerce HQ	96.28
NI Court Service	96.23
Cabinet Office (OPS)	96.21
Food Standards Agency	96.00
Office of the Rail Regulator	95.69
Lord Chancellor's Department	95.43
Office for Standards in Education	94.76
Department for Education and Skills	94.52
Department of Health	94.46
Department for National Savings and Investments	94.43
Office of Fair Trading	94.02
Serious Fraud Office	92.77
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	92.46
Department for Work and Pensions	92.03
Scotland Office	92.24
Department for Transport	91.96
DEFRA	91.43
Royal Mint	90.57
Crown Prosecution Service	90.42
Office of Gas and Electricity Markets	89.54
Home Office	88.64
Wales Office	88.48
Northern Ireland Office	85.16
HM Treasury	84.06
Government Communications HQ	83.98
Average percentage paid on time	94.83

Coal Authority

The Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services (Mr. Stephen Timms): I have today laid a copy of the Coal Authority report and accounts for 2002–03 before Parliament.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Executive Agencies

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): I have today laid before Parliament the 2002–03 annual reports and accounts for each of our four executive agencies: Jobcentre Plus (HC 981), The Pension Service (HC 790), Child Support Agency (HC 844) and Appeals Service (HC 792).

I am pleased to be able to announce today additional performance targets in respect of the customer facing businesses of the Department for Work and Pensions: Jobcentre Plus, The Pension Service, Child Support Agency and Disability and Carers Directorate.

In line with the Department's public service agreement we are committed to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our services. In order to demonstrate this, we are developing a range of unit cost and other efficiency targets. The full implementation of these targets is dependent on the implementation of a new suite of accounting and resource management systems.

In the meantime, to demonstrate our continuing commitment to driving down the costs of our services, I am announcing a series of interim targets that use a basic measure of the unit costs of the services we provide to customers.

Details of the targets are in the table.

Cost Category	*Target*
Jobcentre Plus	
Job placements	
Staff cost per job point[1]	£64.60
Benefit processing activity	
Staff cost per transaction	£10.20
The Pension Service	
Staff cost per customer	£25.00
Child Support Agency	
Staff cost per live case	£184.00
Disability and Carers	
Staff cost per customer contact	£138.00

Note:

[1] Jobcentre Plus has a performance measure that awards a different number of points for the job placement of different groups of the population with a greater number of points for those that it is more difficult to find work.

CABINET OFFICE

Public Bodies

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Douglas Alexander): I have today placed in the Libraries of both Houses copies of the latest edition of the annual Cabinet Office Publication, *Public Bodies*. This publication, available in pdf format, has been placed upon the Cabinet Office's agencies and Public Bodies Team website, http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/agencies-publicbodies/.

Public Bodies 2003 is the latest in a series of publications providing information on public bodies sponsored by Government.

In addition to giving details of the remit of the public bodies, the publication also provides information about the membership of the boards of public bodies, including the numbers of women, people with disabilities and minority ethnic members.

Departments continue to work hard to increase the number of appointees from currently under-represented groups to achieve equal representation of women and men, pro rata representation of members of minority ethnic groups and increased participation of disabled people. As at 31 March 2003, 35.7 per cent. of appointments to public bodies were held by women, 5.3 per cent. by people with a minority ethnic background and 3.1 per cent. by disabled people.

The publication also includes information about the Government's task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews, giving a more complete picture of the bodies and groups working to deliver the Government's objectives.

Public Services (Inspection and External Review)

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The last few years have seen a rapid expansion in the scope and depth of inspection and external review. In December 2001, the Public Services Productivity Panel published its report on the Role of External Review in Improving Performance and called for further work into the focus and impact of inspection and external review. I have today published *Inspecting for improvement: developing a customer focused approach*, the report of this further study, which was carried out by the Office of Public Services Reform in close co-operation with the Treasury.

The report concludes that inspection and external review play an important role in providing assurance on the delivery of national standards and in holding organisations to account for their performance. Inspection should also act as a catalyst for change and service improvement.

The report recommends that the Government should set out its policy for inspection and external review. I am publishing the policy today. Key principles underpinning it are the pursuit of service improvement, a focus on outcomes and taking a user perspective, inspection in proportion to risk, collaboration and joint working between inspectorates, openness and reporting in public, continually learning from experience and improving value for money and effectiveness.

The report also recommends that the Government should establish a mechanism for ensuring better strategic direction of inspection activity. On 3 July, the Prime Minister announced a new sub-committee of Cabinet for this purpose. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury will chair it.

The report makes a number of recommendations for departments and inspectorates. Departments should take the lead in managing inspection and external review in their areas, clarifying roles, responsibilities and priorities, setting standards and requiring and facilitating collaboration between inspectorates. Inspectorates should operate within the Government's strategic framework for inspection and external review, providing advice to departments on improving service delivery, working with other inspectorates and gauging their impact and cost effectiveness.

I have arranged for copies of the report and the policy to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Civil Service Recruitment

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The eighth annual Civil Service Fast Stream Report was published on-line http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/reports/faststream and a stock of summary flyers placed in the Libraries of the House. It covers the year from 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003, and reports the results of Fast Stream competitions completed during that period and the developments that have taken place.

The standard of entry to the Fast Stream development programme has remained consistently high and the Report shows that the Civil Service has had

increasing success in filling its vacancies. In addition there has again been steady progress in broadening the diversity of Fast Stream recruits.

Women and men applied in equal numbers, with women being marginally more successful overall.

Both the proportions of candidates recruited from ethnic minority groups and of those recording a disability rose again this year.

We are gradually improving the percentage of recruits from universities from which we have not traditionally recruited.

Central Office of Information

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Douglas Alexander): Copies of the Central Office of Information's Annual Report and Accounts have been today laid before Parliament, and copies placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 17 July 2003

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Housing (Planning)

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): The Communities Plan sets out this Government's vision for sustainable communities where everyone has the opportunity to be decently housed, in a prosperous community, with a good quality of life. This Statement concerns the planning system's role in providing sufficient, and better designed, homes to meet the variety of housing needs in England, and clarifies aspects of the Government's policy for planning new housing set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 (PPG3). Together with the measures in Budget 2003 which it complements, it is an important part of the process to enhance the flexibility of our housing market and planning system, and thereby help secure the changes which are required to meet the tests for membership of the Euro-zone. The intention is to remove barriers to delivering the housing needed in our communities and ensure the planning system is not a brake on an adequate and continuing supply of sites for housing in sustainable locations.

Local authorities should:

- enable the provision of sufficient new homes in the right place at the right time and avoid arbitrarily phasing new housing development;
- provide for at least ten years potential supply of housing;
- put unneeded employment sites back into use through actively considering residential development;
- promote sustainable residential environments;
- be flexible on car parking requirements;
- improve the contribution development makes to securing affordable homes and ensure the size and type of housing better matches the need;
- take responsibility locally for delivery.

Enabling the provision of sufficient new homes in the right place at the right time

Research published today by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister shows the policy in PPG3 has generally been well-integrated into forward planning and development control processes. But there is evidence that necessary housing development has been delayed in some areas.

The planning system must enable the provision of new homes in the right place and at the right time, whether through new development or the conversion of existing buildings. This is important not only to ensure that everyone has the opportunity of a decent home but also to avoid constraining economic growth and the delivery of quality public services.

Achieving a better balance between housing availability and the demand for housing is a key priority for this Government. Regional planning bodies should maintain an up-to-date understanding of the likely housing requirements of their areas, and have regard to Government policy to reduce volatility in the housing market and promote macro-economic stability as part of delivering sustainable development. Regional planning bodies should prepare regional planning guidance, and local planning authorities prepare plans, with the aim of providing sufficient housing opportunities to meet the likely housing requirements of their areas. And in doing so, there should be a choice of sites which are both suitable and available for housebuilding.

Removing barriers: planning for at least ten years potential supply of housing

Paragraph 28 of PPG3 requires local and unitary development plans to identify sites for housing and buildings for conversion and re-use sufficient to meet housing requirements, after making an allowance for windfalls, and manage the release of land over the plan period. The duration of a plan should be for a period of 10 years from the plan's forecast adoption date. This means plans should make provision for at least ten years' potential supply of housing.

Paragraph 34 of PPG3 requires sufficient sites to be shown on the plan's proposal map to accommodate at least the first five years (or the first two phases) of housing development proposed in the plan. This does not mean plans should only have a 5-year time horizon nor is it guidance directed at the determination of planning applications. The purpose is to safeguard against unrealistic windfall allowances. Identifying sites on the proposals map allows allocations to be drawn on expeditiously if the monitoring required by PPG3 demonstrates that windfalls are not being realised as anticipated. If windfalls are being realised as anticipated not all of the sites allocated on the proposals map (which in aggregate provide sufficient capacity to accommodate the first five years or so of housing development) will be needed during the plan's first five years. Managing their release through phasing allows the timely release of sites in support of sustainable development. The aim is to avoid disruption to housing supply, without undermining a plan-led approach to implementing the site search and allocation sequence set out in PPG3.

Removing barriers: stopping the arbitrary use of phasing

The managed release of housing sites should support the planning strategy set out in regional planning guidance and development plans. Phasing should not be arbitrary. It should secure the timely delivery of the agreed housing numbers set out in up-to-date regional planning guidance and:

- reflect the policy objectives set out in PPG3;
- reflect any strategic principles that have been established;
- be based on realistic assumptions;
- be deliverable and cost-effective;
- be transparent, based on clear policies set out in the local plan and not an arbitrary process;
- be dynamic, and capable of regular monitoring and review.

REMOVING BARRIERS: PUTTING UNNEEDED EMPLOYMENT SITES BACK INTO USE

PPG3 encourages local planning authorities when reviewing their development plan to consider whether land currently allocated for employment, and other uses, might be better used for housing or mixed-use developments. The Government's experience is that despite this encouragement many authorities continue to reserve an excess supply when it would make sense to consider this for housing. Through the forthcoming revision of planning guidance on commercial development and industry (currently PPG4), local planning authorities will be required to undertake a review of all land currently allocated for industrial or commercial use. Practice guidance will be provided to help establish realistic assessments of likely take-up.

The Government also propose to add new policy to PPG3 to require the reuse of industrial and commercial land for housing unless a convincing case for retention can be made. This proposal is the subject of consultation which is published today. Local planning authorities are reminded that the policy is as stated in PPG3 but that emerging Government policy, in the form of draft policy guidance, can be regarded as a material consideration, depending on the context.

REMOVING BARRIERS: TACKLING OBSTACLES TO SUSTAINABLE RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENTS

The Government are concerned about obstructions to delivering sustainable residential environments. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is today publishing research on the difficulties faced by housebuilders in their efforts to integrate well-designed higher density housing with local highway requirements. The Government will look very carefully at the recommendations in the report. Local highway considerations should not without good justification stifle innovative design.

REMOVING BARRIERS: FLEXIBILITY ON CAR PARKING

With the right parking policies it is possible to increase densities, reduce pressures on the countryside and produce more sustainable developments. PPG3 advises that car parking standards that result, on average, in development with more than 1.5 off-street car parking spaces per dwelling are unlikely to reflect the Government's emphasis on securing sustainable residential environments. This does not mean the Government expects all dwellings in all new developments to have 1.5 parking spaces. The policy envisages an average over a local authority's area.

The Government accept that parking needs vary. There will be locations and housing types where significantly lower levels of off-street parking can be sought. But for family housing, and in rural locations where there is heavier reliance on the private car, higher levels of car parking may be appropriate. This is why PPG3 advises that parking polices should be framed with good design in mind, and recognise that car ownership varies with income, age, household type, and the type of housing and its location. To help the development of appropriate standards, the Government will carry out research to consider how varying levels of car parking can be achieved in ways consistent with their policy on sustainable residential environments.

PLANNING FOR ALL IN THE COMMUNITY

The Government believe that it is important to help create mixed and inclusive communities, which offer a choice of housing and lifestyle. The planning system has an important role in creating communities with a better mix of housing, in terms of size, type and affordability. Planning for housing policies in regional planning guidance and local planning authorities' plans should be based on an up-to-date understanding of the housing required in communities and aim to widen the range of housing opportunity. The housing requirements of the whole community should be addressed, including those in need of affordable housing.

PLANNING FOR ALL IN THE COMMUNITY: DELIVERING MORE AFFORDABLE HOUSING

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced earlier this year that the existing guidance on planning for affordable housing would be updated and supported with practical advice about what works well and where. In particular, he said the Government would consult on allowing local authorities to seek affordable housing on smaller sites where this is justified. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is publishing today for consultation proposed changes to planning policy for affordable housing. The aim is a policy framework that will secure more affordable housing without affecting the overall supply of housing.

PLANNING FOR ALL IN THE COMMUNITY: MATCHING SUPPLY WITH NEED

The Sustainable Communities Plan also highlighted the Government's concern that the houses built do not always adequately reflect a community's needs. The Government are working with local authorities, housebuilders and other housing providers to ensure that the size and type of housing better matches need, especially by providing more homes for the increasing number of smaller households. The draft update places more emphasis, than currently in PPG3, on producing a better match between the housing planned and the needs of the community.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY LOCALLY

In conclusion, the Government look to local authorities actively to facilitate the delivery of the housing needed in their communities in the form of well-designed, higher density residential developments. They are consulting on improvements to the policy framework, and copies are available in both Libraries of the House. Additionally, at a future date, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will set out how the Government will take forward the commitment in the Budget report to

> "improve the performance of planning authorities that are not delivering an adequate supply of new housing—including incentives, support, and engagement—followed, where necessary, by intervention".

Housing Revenue Account Subsidies

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): Following public consultation, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is about to write to Chief Finance Officers of local housing authorities in England to inform them about changes to the way in which Housing Revenue Account (HRA) subsidy is delivered for Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes.

The changes reform the HRA subsidy arrangements and will mean that local housing authorities receive a fixed level of annual subsidy, a "PFI allowance" for the duration of the scheme. There will be retrospective arrangements for authorities already receiving HRA PFI subsidy.

The letter, guidance on the new arrangements and the consultation paper may be found on Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website at http://www.odpm.gov.uk.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): I am today issuing for consultation proposals that are designed to improve the distribution between authorities in England of housing revenue account (HRA) subsidy management and maintenance (M&M) allowances. Copies of the consultation paper and accompanying technical annex are available on the ODPM website and paper copies will be available in the Libraries of the House shortly.

HRA subsidy provides support to local authorities to manage and maintain their council stock. M&M allowances are a key component of subsidy, and currently total some £3 billion annually. This is shared between authorities on the basis of a formulaic approach that has changed little since it was introduced more than ten years ago. It no longer adequately reflects the circumstances and challenges facing housing authorities, including the drive for decent homes, and the problems of deprivation, anti-social behaviour, and low demand. As part of the move to a modern, fairer and more efficient housing finance system, with rent restructuring bringing coherence to local authority rents, we have made clear the need to look again at the way all resources are allocated. This consultation paper is part of that process.

Comments on the proposals in the consultation paper have been invited by 15 October.

Local Planning Authorities

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's public service agreement 6 (PSA6) requires all local planning authorities to complete local development frameworks by 2006 and to perform at or above best value targets for development control by 2006 with interim milestones to be agreed in the service delivery agreement. Our approach to achieving this target is based on putting in place a programme of planning reforms which will deliver a step change in the way planning is carried out, and in the performance of the planning system to deliver sustainable development in the right place at the right time. This will be delivered through primary and secondary legislation, through progress in pursuing best value in local authority services, and through a culture change for all stakeholders in planning. The importance of delivering against PSA6 is recognised by both local and central Government. This statement sets out the approach we intend to take and the measures we have put in place to ensure that we can work together with local Government to deliver this.

At the individual local authority level, we are supporting those who are seeking to improve planning performance by giving additional resources through the planning delivery grant and by providing advice, guidance and help, including through a proposed new planning advisory service. The planning delivery grant is providing £350 million to authorities and regional planning bodies over three years between 2003-04 and 2005-06 and is being distributed to those that demonstrate improvement in their planning services. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, together with other stakeholders including the Planning Officers Society, the Local Government Association and the Improvement and Development Agency, already offer a range of good practice guidance and advice. We shall be reviewing and, where necessary, updating that guidance and advice. The planning advisory service is to be piloted later in 2003.

Our engagement with councils will be in accordance with the protocol agreed with local government and will be responsive to the outcome of comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) and performance against our best value targets for planning. In particular we will seek to work with councils in the context of their improvement planning to raise the quality of planning services. In line with the expectation that all authorities will meet PSA6, our work will be with any authority.

For each financial year, we will identify, in consultation with the Government offices for the regions, poorly performing development control authorities. Such judgments will be based on the level of performance the authority has achieved in relation to meeting the PSA6 targets, and the rate or direction of change in the authority's performance. Where necessary, we will set authorities best value performance standards for a financial year. We are already engaged with a number of authorities that have been or are now failing to make adequate progress towards the PSA6 targets and will continue such action with any further authorities in 2003-04 and 2004-05. In relation to the preparation of local development frameworks, subject to the enactment of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill, we will have regard to the progress against the local development scheme as set out in the annual monitoring report.

By 2005-06, any authority that is not close to achieving the development control targets or is not making timely progress against its local development scheme or both will be regarded as poorly performing in planning services. The objective is to work with authorities to drive their performance up to meet the PSA6 targets. During the year in which they are subject to standards or when an annual monitoring report shows failure of an authority to adhere to its local development scheme, we will investigate the action authorities are taking to improve their performance and assess the likelihood that they will meet the PSA6 targets.

Where we judge that any authority lacks the commitment or capacity to improve its planning performance, we will consider whether and how to support performance improvement. In arriving at such judgments we will be looking, in the light of the results the authority is achieving, at the adequacy of the processes and managerial systems; the level of professional competence; the level of resource and other inputs to the planning service; and at the political and managerial leadership.

We will identify mechanisms that will enable us, as far as possible, to work with councils to focus action and support within the authority's regular cycle of improvement planning. Each year, every authority must publish its priorities in its best value performance plan. Those authorities that have been through CPA will also be required to undertake recovery or improvement planning. Where we engage directly with authorities, we will discuss with them what specific areas we will expect them to address in such plans. Among the issues that we will want to explore with authorities in following up improvement planning will be close monitoring of performance and change management; the recruitment and retention of staff and development of skills for members and officers; the adequacy of resourcing and the systems and processes in place; and outsourced delivery. We will work with councils through the Audit Commission relationship manager, where relevant, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister appointed Lead Official, and the Government offices in the Regions,

Where, in our view, the actions that an authority is taking to improve performance are not adequate to put them on a course to meet the PSA6 targets by 2006–07, we will consider intervention under the powers available to us. We will not seek to intervene until an authority has had an adequate opportunity to put right its own failings and any intervention would be proportionate to the failure. However, where intervention is necessary, we will carry it through with determination and vigour. Powers under the Local Government Act 1999 include the power to direct, which might include directing inspection of or inquiries into planning services, and the tendering or outsourcing of services. Those under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill enable the Secretary of State to direct on aspects of the plan making process, including the local development scheme.

The use of intervention powers in respect of development control performance would be a last resort, and decisions taken on them would be made in the context of CPA and the protocol. Its objective and content would reflect the need to achieve the PSA6 targets and therefore any authority at risk of not meeting the targets would be liable to intervention. Having regard to the wider context of CPA, the Government will take a different approach in relation to high performing authorities than to poorer performing ones. We will expect excellent authorities to improve their planning performance without support from Government. In weaker authorities we will offer a more intensive model of support and intervention.

Through our planning reform programme and, where necessary, engagement and intervention, our objective is to work with authorities to develop a culture of continuous improvement in the delivery of an excellent planning service which produces timely, high quality and sustainable outcomes.

Local Government Ombudsman

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Phil Hope): I have today placed in the Library of the House the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2002–03.

The Report was published on 3 July. As required by Section 23 of the Local Government Act 1974 copies have been sent to the Local Government Association, as the designated representatives of Local Government, and to the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Report includes individual reports by the three Local Government Ombudsmen in England and includes information about complaints received during 2002–03, a review of the legislation governing the work of the Ombudsman, and details of the way in which the Ombudsman is working to improve delivery of public services by local authorities.

The full text of the Report is available on the Commission's website: www.lgo.org.uk.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Maghaberry Prison

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): I wish to announce that with effect from 31 July 2003, in accordance with the powers conferred on me by Rule 5(1) of the Prisons and Young Offenders Centre Rules (Northern Ireland) 1995, that part of Maghaberry Prison site is removed from within the boundaries of Maghaberry Prison. The area to be removed is indicated on the site map, which I have today placed in the Libraries of both Houses, by the words

"area to be removed from the site of Maghaberry Prison".

North/South Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland Limited

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): I have today placed in the Library papers relating to decisions that have been taken during the period 1 May 2003 to 30 June 2003 which relate to the North/South Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland Limited under the terms of the exchange of notes of 19 November 2002 (Cmnd 5708).

Prison Service

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): I have placed copies of the Northern Ireland Prison Service's Corporate and Business Plan for 2003–06 and the Annual Report and Accounts for 2002–03 in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Corporate and Business Plan contains Key Performance Targets I have set for the Service for 2003–04. These are:

1. 100 per cent. security for top and high risk prisoners.

2. 99.7 per cent. security for medium and low risk prisoners.

3. The number of staff assaulted by prisoners is less than a ratio of 5 per 100 prisoners.

4. The number of prisoners assaulted by prisoners is less than a ratio of 7.5 per 100 prisoners.

5. An average of at least 20 hours constructive activity per week for each sentenced prisoner.

6. An average of at least 12 hours constructive activity per week for each remand prisoner.

7. To ensure 82.5 per cent. of prisoners serving six months or more are working to a resettlement plan and that 95 per cent. of all lifers work to a resettlement plan, including preparation of the plan in the first six months from sentence.

8. Deliver at least 85 per cent. of the planned training days associated with the agreed corporate training priorities.

9. Reduce the average staff sickness days per head over the year to no more than 19 representing approximately a 30 per cent. reduction in sick absence over the year and an end of year figure equivalent to 14 days per annum per member of staff.

10. Ensure expenditure is within the budget allocated.

11. Lay the Annual Report and Audited Accounts before Parliament prior to the summer recess.

The Annual Report details that the Service met 8 out of its 11 key targets and 10 of their 16 development objectives with significant progress made against the other six.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Assets Recovery Agency

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Caroline Flint): I am pleased to announce that the first annual report of the Assets Recovery Agency will be laid before Parliament on 8 September 2003.

The report is the first by the agency and covers the financial year 2002–03. The agency became operational on 24 February 2003, and the report covers the setting up of the agency and the first few weeks of its work. The next report will include an assessment of how the agency has carried out its first business plan, which was published on 9 July.

The agency is already making use of its powers, and has obtained several orders to freeze suspected criminal assets.

The establishment of the agency, with extensive powers to investigate and recover criminal assets, shows the Government's commitment to taking the profit out of crime.

Forensic Science Service

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): An independent review of the Forensic Science Service was announced on 23 July 2002 by the Minister of State for Policing and Crime Reduction. The review has been overseen by a steering group which all key stakeholders were invited to join. The review team reported at the beginning of July this year.

The main thrust of the report focuses on the emergence of a more competitive market for forensic science services and the ability of the FSS to compete effectively in the face of a significantly changing environment. The report makes a number of helpful observations and recommendations aimed at improving FSS performance, but the most fundamental is that it should be transformed from a trading fund into a Government-owned company as a precursor to development into a private sector classified Public Private Partnership (PPP).

The main risk if the FSS remains as a trading fund is that there would be a sustained and accelerating loss of business. Indeed, some forces are already outsourcing their forensic requirements to alternative suppliers. A cumulative loss of market share could reach a point at which poor trading forced cut-backs in investment, research and development and staffing. I see radical change as the only realistic option to ensure that FSS remains competitive and able to make best use of rapidly advancing science and technology to reduce crime and deliver safer communities.

The report identifies the inherent risks, but makes a clear case for accepting that PPP offers the best means of protecting the public interest and delivering major benefits to the Criminal Justice System (CJS) by enabling FSS to compete effectively. I endorse this approach and the steering group's overall view that the FSS would prosper in a private sector environment, as it clearly reflects the realities of the situation. At a time when demand for forensic analysis in crime investigation is increasing significantly, FSS performance has been mixed. There have been some notable successes, but we need to take steps to improve the service to the wider CJS in terms of timeliness and cost effectiveness. The emergence of a small but effective and dynamic private sector has resulted in an increasingly competitive market in forensic science services, the level and intensity of which is likely to gather pace.

I am confident that the proposed change will stimulate and broaden the market, encouraging CJS customers to make even greater use of forensic science in the fight against crime, and generating momentum through improved investment to enable the increasingly effective use of forensic capabilities. This, in turn, will result in forensic science making a substantially greater contribution to crime reduction. A number of significant logistical issues inevitably need to be addressed, but I believe that all of these challenges can be dealt with successfully in a transitional period as a Government-owned company.

As the report contains commercially sensitive information, a copy of the executive summary has been placed in the Library.

UK Passport Service

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): The UK Passport Service Annual Report and Accounts 2002–03 has been published today and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Asylum Support Adjudicators

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): Following a request, in 2002, from the Chief Asylum Support Adjudicator for an increase in the Asylum Support Adjudicators' (ASA) salary scale, we undertook a review in partnership with PricewaterhouseCoopers. The review found there to be a justifiable linkage between the ASAs' salaries and Group 7 of the judicial scale, which the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) accepts. Therefore, with effect from April 2003, the Home Secretary will consider ASA salaries in the light of that linkage and the annual recommendations of the SSRB.

Voluntary and Community Sector

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Fiona Mactaggart): I am today placing in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament copies of the Report of the Fourth Annual Meeting to review the Compact on relations between Government and the voluntary and community sector on 28 April 2003.

The meeting witnessed the momentum achieved in driving the Compact as the framework guiding the relationship between Government and the voluntary and community sector. There was record attendance at this year's meeting. Local Government were represented for the first time, reflecting the need to focus on implementing the Compact at local level. We need to work together with the voluntary and community sector to achieve real change in the way the sector contributes to the delivery of better public services.

Animal Experiments

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Caroline Flint): I wish to announce that the 2002 statistics of scientific procedures on living animals in Great Britain will be published as a Command Paper on 18 July. Copies will be placed in the House Library in the usual way.

The number of scientific procedures licensed under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and started in 2002 was just over 2.73 million, a rise of about 110,000 (4.2 per cent.) on 2001. This increase is not seen as beyond the bounds of normal year-on-year fluctuations, and the Government have no anxieties or concerns arising from the detail of the statistics.

A familiar pattern is evident. Mice, rats and other rodents were used in the majority of procedures—84 per cent. of the total. Most of the remainder used birds (5 per cent. of all procedures), and fish (7 per cent.). Dogs, cats, horses and non-human primates, afforded special protection by the Act, were collectively used in fewer than 1 per cent. of the procedures.

There was a slight decrease in the proportion of procedures using genetically normal animals (65 per cent. as against 67 per cent. in 2001), and a small increase in the proportion of procedures using those which had been genetically modified (26 per cent. as against 24 per cent. in 2001). This continues a trend apparent in recent years, though the variations are on this occasion minimal. It is worth recording that only one in three of all the recorded procedures involving genetically modified animals were for purposes other than breeding.

Non-toxicological procedures accounted for about 82 per cent. of those carried out in 2002, with the main areas of use being for immunological studies and pharmaceutical research and development. Of the procedures for toxicological purposes, 61 per cent. were for pharmacological safety and efficacy studies, and most were performed to conform with regulatory requirements.

About 40 per cent. of all procedures used some form of anaesthesia to alleviate the severity of the interventions. For many of the remaining procedures the use of anaesthesia would have increased the animal welfare cost of the procedure. Over 99 per cent. of procedures carried out on animals listed in Schedule 2 of the 1986 Act involved use of animals acquired from designated sources in the United Kingdom.

I should point out in relation to the statistics that the Home Office, as regulatory authority under the 1986 Act, has no control over the overall amount of animal research and testing which takes place. We do nevertheless ensure, in carrying out our licensing function, that the provisions of the Act are rigorously applied in each programme of work. In particular we always insist in every case upon full application of the 3Rs—replacement of animals where possible, and where they must be used, reduction to a minimum of their numbers and refinement of the procedures to minimise suffering. To that end, all licence applications are carefully assessed by the professional Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate, who then closely monitor work in progress to ensure compliance with licence authorities, and with the related codes of practice concerning standards of care and accommodation for the animals.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Advisory Group to the Employer Task Force on Pensions

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): I am pleased to announce membership for the advisory group to the Employer Task Force on Pensions today, as set out below. The

role of the advisory group is to provide the Employer Task Force with access to experience and expertise from key organisations with an interest in pensions.

Member	*Organisation*
Sir Peter Davis Chairman of Employer Task Force and Advisory Body	Employer Task Force Chairman Chief Executive J Sainsburys plc
Duncan Brown Assistant Director General	Chartered Institute of Personnel Development
Kay Carberry Assistant General Secretary	Trade Union Congress
George Cox Director General	Institute of Directors
John Cridland Deputy Director General	CBI
Donald Duval President	The Society of Pensions Consultants
Carl Emmerson Programme Director	Institute of Fiscal Studies
Christine Famish Chief Executive	National Association of Pension Funds
Mick Folger Director, Conduct of Business Standards	Financial Services Authority
Mary Francis Director General	Association of British Insurers
Tony Hobman Chief Executive	OPRA
Ed Mayo Chief Executive	National Consumer Council
David Pollard Chairman	Association of Pension Lawyers
Gordon Pollock Chairman	Association of Consulting Actuaries
Richard Saunders Chief Executive	Investment Management Association

Footnote: Additional Members may be invited to join the advisory group, if appropriate.

Disabled People

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): The New Deal for Disabled People will be extended for a further two years to 31 March 2006. All existing Job Brokers will have the opportunity to participate in this extended programme, but they will be required to meet the new standards of performance and conform to a revised service design that builds on best practice under the existing programme and emerging lessons from the evaluation and experience under other similar programmes including Employment Zones.

Job Brokers will be expected to develop rigorous and appropriate back to work plans to support individuals in return for an initial £300 payment for the registration of new customers. We will also be bringing the sustained outcome payments into line with other programmes by making payments after individuals have been in work for 13 weeks and not 26 weeks as currently. Job Brokers will still be expected, however, to provide ongoing support over at least the first 6 months of employment and we will review the effectiveness of their arrangements through our contract management system and through the evaluation of the programme.

To participate in this extension Job Brokers will need to demonstrate that they can meet challenging performance targets, in particular in moving people into work. Those Brokers who can demonstrate an ability to meet high levels of performance will have the opportunity to expand their services; and at the same time we will be offering limited, geographically focused opportunities for new providers to enter the programme. Further details about the terms on which extended contracts will be let and upon which new providers might be able to deliver services will be published in the autumn.

DEFENCE

Training Group Defence Agency

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): The Commander-in-Chief, Royal Air Force Personnel and Training Command has set the Chief Executive of the Training Group Defence Agency the following targets for Financial Year 2003–04:

KEY TARGET 1a:

Training Output—Quantity of Output (Ab Initio Flying Training)

To train the required number of aircrew of the three Services to standards for entry to Royal Air Force and Royal Navy operational conversion unit training, the Defence Helicopter Flying School and other specialist flying training courses.

Fast-Jet Pilots	67
Multi-Engine Pilots	62
Rotary Wing Pilots	37
Fast-Jet Weapons Systems Operators	28
Multi-Engine Weapons Systems Operators	9
Rotary Wing Weapons Systems Operators	5
Non-Commissioned Aircrew	103
Total	311

KEY TARGET 1b:

Training Output—Quantity of Output (Ab Initio Ground Training)

To train the detailed number of military personnel to the standards required to undertake ground appointments.

Officer Initial Specialist Training	339
Airman Initial Specialist Training	2,504
Total	2,843

KEY TARGET 2a:

Training Output—Quantity of Output—Training Places (Flying)

To train aircrew of the three Services to standards for entry to the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy operational conversion unit training, the Defence Helicopter Flying School and other specialist flying training courses, as well as providing training places for international students.

Flying Training Courses—RN	202
Flying Training Courses—Army	374
RAF Flying Instructor Courses	150
RAF Refresher & Orientation Courses	170
RAF Specialist & Operational Courses	240
Flying Training (International)	92
Total1	1,228

KEY TARGET 2b:

Training Output—Quantity of Output—Training Places (Ground)

To train military personnel to the standards required to undertake ground appointments.

Pre-Employment Training	16,029
Career Development Training	6,562
Total	22,591

KEY TARGET 3:

Quality of Output

To underpin the military effectiveness of the Royal Air Force by the timely provision of military personnel trained to the standards agreed with the Agency's customers.

KEY TARGET 4:

Cost Management

To ensure that the necessary systems are in place to manage the business on an output-cost basis.

KEY TARGET 5:

Efficiency

To reduce the average per capita cost of initial training measured as a cumulative improvement on 2000–02 costs.

Low Flying

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): The ability to fly fast and low continues to be an essential skill in our armoury of tactics. Training for aircrew to achieve and maintain these skills is vital.

The amount of low flying training carried out in the United Kingdom Low Flying System (UKLFS) during the training year April 2002 to March 2003 was the minimum necessary for aircrew to reach and maintain these skills. Hours booked for low flying training in the UKLFS (excluding the Rotary Wing Dedicated User Areas, where different booking arrangements apply) during this period amounted to an overall increase of 2.6 per cent. compared to the previous training year. The increase may be linked to preparations for operations, and an increase in the flying of Apache aircraft in preparation for their introduction into service. Since detailed records of hours booked began in 1995, the annual total has reduced by some 29 per cent.

The distribution of low-flying training across the UK has not changed significantly over previous years. It is spread as widely as practicable, but for a variety of reasons including population distribution, and geographic and climatic considerations, it is inevitable that some parts of the country will see more low flying than others.

I have today placed in the Library of the House a report giving a detailed account of low flying training in the UK Low Flying System for the period April 2002 to March 2003.

Further copies of the report can be obtained from the Vote office or it can be viewed on the MOD's web site: www.mod.uk/issues/lowflying

Service Children's Education

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): The Chief Executive of Service Children's Education has been set the following Key Targets for 2003–04:

To meet the following percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 or above at the end of Key Stage 1 in:

Reading	91 per cent.
Writing	93 per cent.
Mathematics	95 per cent.

To meet the following percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or above at the end of Key Stage 2 in:

Reading	85 per cent.
Writing	69 per cent.
English	80 per cent.
Mathematics	81 per cent.
Science	91 per cent.

To meet the following percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 or above at the end of Key Stage 3 in:

English	79 per cent.
Mathematics	79 per cent.
Science	78 per cent.
ICT	68 per cent.

For Year 11 pupils in SCE to meet the following Key Stage 4 (GCSE) targets:

Pupils achieving 5 or more GCSE passes at Grades A*–G	96 per cent.
Pupils achieving 5 or more GCSE passes at Grades A*–C	57 per cent.

To maintain the following three-year rolling average percentage of achieving 5 or more higher (A–C) in GCSE of 54 per cent.*

For pupils in SCE to meet the following Key Stage 5 (CA5 Level) targets:

Subject entries achieving passes at grades A–E	100 per cent.
Subject entries achieving passes at grades A–C	65 per cent.

To maintain the following three-year rolling average of subject entries achieving passes at grades A–C at 'A' Level of 65 per cent.

OfSTED UK LEA performance—to meet the following standards in OfSTED reports of inspections of SCE schools:

Quality, School Climate, Management & Efficiency —Grade 3 or above.	100 per cent.
Standards—Grade 3 or above	96 per cent.
School climate—Grade 2 or above	96 per cent.
Standards—Grade 2 or above	65 per cent.
Quality, Management & Efficiency—Grade 2 or above	85 per cent.

To respond in full to customers seeking education advice from SCE(UK) within the following timescales:

93 per cent. within 10 working days of receipt.
Remainder within 20 working days of receipt.

The Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 value added score for SCE will show an index of at least 100.

Customer Satisfaction:

To demonstrate customer satisfaction with SCE schools through a result of 69 per cent. or greater satisfaction from the Army Continuous Attitude Surveys.

To develop customer performance criteria on the efficiency and effectiveness of SCE Headquarters for incorporation as a Key Target for 2004 and beyond.

Army Training and Recruitment Agency

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The Chief Executive of the Army Training and Recruitment Agency has been set the following Key Targets for 2003–04.

1. To meet the Army's requirement from the ATRA for 600 trained mainstream officers available to take up their first appointment within a permissible variance of 2 per cent. The 2002–03 performance was an output of 604.

2. To meet the Army's requirement from the ATRA for 9,400 soldiers available to take up their first appointment within a permissible variance of + 1 to − 2 per cent. The 2002–03 performance was an output of 9,264.

3. To achieve a 98 per cent. first time pass rate to externally endorsed training standards and within course duration for all officers who undergo career or professional development training after meeting entry standards. The 2002–03 performance was a first time pass rate of 93.6 per cent.

4. To achieve a 96 per cent. first time pass rate to externally endorsed training standards and within course duration for all soldiers who undergo career or professional development training after meeting entry standards. The 2002–03 performance was a first time pass rate of 94.8 per cent.

5. Subject to realism caveats to reduce the per capita cost of training a successful military recruit to £52.2k by Apr 2006. The 2002–03 performance discounted for the effect of the estate revaluation, was £53.4k against a target of £54k.

Army Personnel Centre

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The Chief Executive of the Army Personnel Centre has been set the following Key Targets for 2003–04.

To maintain at 94 per cent. the percentage of posts which are manned (excluding posts gapped for less than 28 days and all posts for private soldiers and subaltern officers). The 2002–03 performance was the maintenance of 94 per cent. of posts manned.

To maintain at 98 per cent. the proportion of personnel posted in-year by the APC whose rank and Service qualifications meet the specifications of the post. The 2002–03 performance was 97.5 per cent. of personnel posted in-year who met the specifications of the post.

To maintain at 65 per cent. the percentage of in-year postings authorised by the APC where personnel are given at least four months notification. The 2002–03 output was 64.8 per cent. of personnel were given at least four months notification.

To remain within 0 per cent. to − 1 per cent. of the annual resource allocation whilst achieving targets. The 2002–03 performance was within minus 0.99 per cent. of the annual resource allocation.

Disposals Process (Review)

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): A business review of the disposals process is to be carried out by the Ministry of Defence. The Review will commence shortly and complete in the autumn.

The aim of the review is to examine the function, operation, funding and organisation of the disposals process, to identify the key objectives, and to determine whether the current arrangements are most appropriate for future needs.

The review team will consult with a range of stakeholders during the course of the review including MOD and Single Service sponsors, TUs, other Government Departments and other relevant bodies. The Ministry of Defence is interested to hear the views of other organisations or individuals who would like to make a contribution to the review. Those wishing to do so should send their contributions by 31 July 2003 to:

The Disposals Process Business Review Team
Ministry of Defence
2nd Floor
St Giles Court
1–13 St Giles High Street
London WC2H 8LD
Or by email to:
dgmo-dmcs2@defence.mod.uk

Armoured Vehicles

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): We regularly re-visit existing plans for capability enhancements to ensure they remain tailored to the security environment in which we need to operate. As such, we judge that the Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle (MRAV) is not ideally suited to the type of operations envisaged under the Strategic Defence Review New Chapter and other developing policy work. This, coupled with recent operational experience in the Balkans, Sierra Leone, East Timor, Afghanistan and latterly Iraq, has demonstrated the need for rapid deployability in expeditionary operations. MRAV is not considered able to meet this capability requirement which will be pursued through the Future Rapid Effect System (FRES). FRES will be a very significant component of the long-term transformation of the land battle through its contribution to network-enabled capability. We have written to the German and Dutch Governments to inform them of our decision to withdraw from the MRAV collaborative project.

In parallel with our decision to withdraw from the MRAV programme, we are pleased to announce the results of the competition for the Future Command and Liaison Vehicle (FCLV). The Alvis Vickers Limited Multirole Light Vehicle has been selected to deliver the solution to the Army's requirement for enhanced speed, reliability, flexibility and protection for a wide range of users in combat or peacekeeping operations: FCLV will also provide support for the RAF Regiment. It will play a key role in the Joint Rapid Reaction Forces by providing versatile, airtransportable vehicles, which will be among the first deployed in a crisis and will spearhead the way for troops in combat or peacekeeping operations. FCLV will replace a mixed fleet of ageing vehicles which were acquired as a stopgap following the withdrawal of the Ferret Scout Car. This contract is worth over £200 million and is a good result for the United Kingdom AFV industry.

Iraq Commemoration

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): As the House is aware, we have been considering the precise form in which we should commemorate and mark the operations undertaken in Iraq this year.

I can announce that we have decided that there will be a national service of remembrance and thanksgiving for the campaign in Iraq. This will be held in St Paul's Cathedral on 10 October 2003. The Dean of St Paul's will lead the service and the Archbishop of Canterbury will give the sermon. The service will give thanks for the role UK forces played in ending tyranny in Iraq. It will also give thanks to those personnel, including those that lost their lives, who took part—recognising their professionalism and their achievements.

Members of the Royal Family, the Prime Minister and members of the Government will attend along with Service Chiefs. Representatives of our coalition allies and members of the Opposition will also be invited to the ceremony, along with, importantly, the families of those who so tragically lost their lives over the course of the operation. The majority of the congregation will, though, be personnel who took part in the campaign.

We have given careful thought to the calls made for a parade to mark this event. In accordance with the wishes of the armed forces, we have decided that the most appropriate form of commemoration at the national level would be a service of thanksgiving, but without a parade. At the regional and local level, there will be opportunities for local communities to arrange events for their local units to mark their involvement in, and return from, the operation.

HEALTH

Commission for Health Improvement

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): The Commission for Health Improvement's 2002–03 annual report, entitled "Delivering Improvement", has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Patient Advocacy Services

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): Section 12 of the Health and Social Care Act (2001) places a legal duty on the Secretary of State to make arrangements to provide independent advocacy services to assist individuals making complaints against the National Health Service. We intend to commence this section on 1 September 2003.

Our intention is to deliver arrangements for a national independent complaints advocacy service (ICAS). These intentions were set out in written answers given to the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) on 19 March 2003, *Official Report*, columns 849–51W. The new service will be provided by four contractors who will deliver ICAS across England from the 1 September 2003 on a one year contract. These contractors are The Carers Federation Ltd, POhWER, South East Advocacy Projects and the Citizens Advice.

Delivering ICAS through these contracts will allow primary care trust patients' forums, who will in due course have delegated power to commission or provide ICAS under the NHS Reform and Healthcare Professions Act 2002, time to establish their networks and capacity.

Learning from the experience of community health councils and ICAS pilot projects this will be a completely new service that will provide consistent support to patients with complaints about the NHS across England. ICAS will be provided to standards piloted across the country. The commission for patient and public involvement in health (CPPIH) will, as indicated in its functions in the NHS Reform and Healthcare Professions Act 2002, monitor ICAS services against the standards.

We have worked with the CPPIH to set in place arrangements for them to act as the Department's agents to manage these interim contracts on our behalf. We intend shortly to lay amendments to the CPPIH regulations to reflect this additional function.

The new ICAS providers will begin recruiting staff and preparing publicity for patients, and others, during July and August for the commencement of the service on 1 September 2003. We will be notifying our partners in the NHS about the new arrangements so that they can offer the contractors full co-operation before, and during, the contracts and help direct patients to the new service.

Retail Pharmacy Services

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): The Government's response to the Fifth Report of the House of Commons Select Committee on Health, on the control of entry regulations and retail pharmacy services in the UK, Cm 5896, has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

NHS Pensions Agency

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): The 2002–03 report and accounts of the National Health Service Pensions Agency have today been laid before the House of Commons pursuant to section 7 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I am today publishing the executive summary of the Quinquennial Review of the NHS Pensions Agency.

I have accepted all of its recommendations including a change of status for the Agency. From 1 April 2004, the NHS Pensions Agency will become a special health authority.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Magistrates Courts

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): I am pleased to be able to announce that today I have placed in the Libraries of both Houses copies of the annual report relating to the 2002–03 business returns provided by magistrates' courts in England and Wales. This is the first time that this report has been published and it heralds a new era in the development of the 42 separate Magistrates' Courts Committee (MCC) areas towards the planned unification with each other and with the Court Service Agency. One key matter in the report relates to the enforcement of fines that have been in the full control of magistrates' courts since April 2001. I addressed the matter of the poor collection rates in a written ministerial statement that I made on 25 June 2003, *Official Report,* column 40WS and I set out the seven point action plan that I am pursuing vigorously in order to improve upon the current performance that has been achieved by magistrates' courts and their agents.

In other areas the magistrates courts have maintained a high level of service during a demanding year. They have supported and participated in a number of criminal justice initiatives, including the street crime initiative in the largest ten areas, extended court sitting hours pilots in London and Manchester and full involvement in the development of the local criminal justice boards. This was during a period when there were considerable additional demands on them. These included the rollout of new computer hardware, new data demands from across the Government service and the MCCs' full involvement in the work being undertaken to facilitate the new planned agency. The latter will bring together the 42 currently independent Magistrates' Courts Committee areas and the Court Service agency into one unified courts administration and considerable work is being done by all involved to ensure a successful outcome.

Particular successes have been in supporting the achievement of the persistent young offender timeliness target of 71 days, reducing it from 142 days and achieving a national average for 2002–03 of 69 days. The active use of courts has also increased from 62.6 per cent. to 67.3 per cent. in 2002–03, which in part reflects the continuing cross-agency approach which means that magistrates courts are being used by other agencies such as the Crown Court and tribunals.

In particular, the Department is leading an initiative, the Case Preparation Project, which involves the other agencies in the Criminal Justice System and which is part of the work looking at what can be done to reduce the number of ineffective trials and improve the service to victims and witnesses.

Overall, there have been a number of successes, but the work that has been announced in relation to the enforcement of fines is particularly important to ensure that there is confidence in the criminal justice system and proper implementation of judicial decisions.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. David Lammy): The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) has laid before Parliament its Annual Report and Accounts for 2002–03. Copies of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2002–03 have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): The Crown Prosecution Service annual report 2002–2003 has today been published and laid before Parliament.

Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Junior Counsel to the Crown

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): The Attorney-General's Report of the Review of current Panels of Junior Counsel to the Crown has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. A copy has also been placed on the website of the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, which can be found at www.lslo.gov.uk.

The Attorney-General (Lord Goldsmith) maintains (by means of an open advertisement and application process) four panels of junior Counsel to undertake civil and EC work for all Government Departments. He has three London panels (an A panel for senior juniors, a B panel for middle juniors and a C panel for junior juniors) and a provincial panel.

The current Panel system for Junior Counsel to the Crown was introduced in 1999, following approval by the then Attorney-General (John Morris QC) of the recommendations arising from a review undertaken by a working party chaired by the then Solicitor -General (Lord Falconer QC) in 1998.

In March 2002, Lord Goldsmith established the Panel Counsel Review Group to review the operation of the current system. The membership consisted of lawyers from within the Government Legal Service and Counsel from the independent Bar. The Review recommends a number of measures to improve the current working of the Panel System. Lord Goldsmith accepts the recommendations, with the following two additional points:

The issue of dual membership in London and the Provinces ought to be revisited and considered in a separate small working group, as suggested in recommendation 14 of the Report; and

With regard to recommendation 10, Lord Goldsmith will review whether an appointment of an external Chair in future selection boards is feasible.

Lord Goldsmith believes that this will satisfy his objective of choosing Counsel of the highest quality to advise and represent Government in a fair, open and transparent way and ensure a fair allocation of this important work across suitable candidates.

Lord Goldsmith is grateful to all those on the Panel Counsel Review Group for their time and expertise in contributing to this review.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

European Capital of Culture

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): Further to the Prime Minister's response to the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) on 4 June, my Ministerial colleagues and I have now visited or met all the cities that were shortlisted in the bidding process for the title of European Capital of Culture 2008 and discussed their plans with them. I want to build on the momentum generated by the capital of culture process and it is clear there is considerable interest in the cities in doing so. Yesterday, I discussed ideas with representatives of all twelve cities that took part in the bidding. I had hoped to make a Ministerial statement on detailed proposals before the summer recess but the cities indicated that they would like more time and I will now make the statement in the autumn.

TREASURY

UK Debt Management Office

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): The UK Debt Management Office's annual report and administrative accounts for 2002–03, the Debt Management Account report and accounts for 2002–03 and the National Investment and Loan Office's resource accounts are being laid before the House of Commons and published today.

Office for National Statistics

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): The annual report and accounts for 2002–03 of the Office for National Statistics are being laid before Parliament today. They contain an assessment of how the Office for National Statistics performed against its key targets in 2002–03. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House and electronic copies are freely available on the National Statistics website.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Community Pharmacies

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): On 17 January 2003 the OFT published its report "*The control of entry regulations and retail pharmacy services in the UK*". On 20 March I told the House that we welcomed the OFT report which is a useful analysis of the market impact of the current control of entry rules on pharmacy provision on consumers and competition. I strongly support the OFT's role in conducting analyses of this kind, which are useful in considering the economic effects of government regulations.

We empowered the OFT and other economic regulators under the Enterprise Act 2002 to advise where laws and regulations may create barriers to entry and competition or channel markets in a particular direction, thereby holding back innovation and progress. Recently we accepted the broad conclusions of similar OFT and Competition Commission investigations into the markets for private dentistry and prescription-only veterinary medicines.

In responding to this report for pharmacy provision in England, the Government must take into account wider NHS policy objectives, and the impact of changes

in regulations on NHS services and patients. That was not part of the OFT's remit but its recommendation must be seen within that broader picture.

Community pharmacies play a vital role, particularly in rural and poorer areas. Pharmacists are trained clinicians and not simply shopkeepers. Eighty per cent. of their income comes from NHS prescriptions whose price is fixed by government. As well as increased competition and choice we want to improve the services provided, and patient access to those services, as part of our wider programme of improvements to the NHS.

Today my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is publishing a new vision for NHS pharmacy—"*A Vision for Pharmacy in the New NHS*"—which builds upon the foundations laid in "*Pharmacy in the Future—Implementing the NHS Plan*".

We want to maintain and improve access to pharmacists in all our communities while continuing to raise standards. We want to encourage innovation and excellence in pharmacy provision and to reward pharmacists that provide the fullest possible range of services, including to our most vulnerable communities.

We do not believe that simple deregulation is the best way to achieve our aims. The OFT made a strong case that the current control of entry rules impede competition and reduce benefits for consumers. But given the current shortage of pharmacists, which will persist for some years until measures which we as a government are taking increase supply, and the Government's desire to see pharmacies given a new and strong role in the modern NHS, the Government does not believe that this is the time to move to a fully deregulated system. It therefore intends to move cautiously in the direction recommended by the OFT.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is today publishing a statement reporting progress on the proposed new national contractual framework for community pharmacy. The current contract is based on an agreement put in place in 1987 and needs updating. The proposed framework will provide a better basis to promote and reward high quality services for consumers. The aim is to introduce the new framework from April 2004.

In addition we will ensure that when considering applications from new pharmacies, or pharmacies wishing to extend service provision, Primary Care Trusts will seek to promote consumer choice and harness the benefits of increased competition. This can be achieved through secondary legislation by incorporating these new criteria for a "necessary or desirable" pharmacy. A potential entrant to the market will, as now, be able to appeal against a Primary Care Trust's decision and the procedures for doing so will be simplified.

We want pharmaceutical services to improve further their accessibility and convenience to consumers. So we will also make it easier for pharmacies to locate in areas where consumers already go, namely large shopping developments. But in doing so we must not undermine the market available to smaller community pharmacies. So only pharmacies wishing to locate in shopping developments over 15,000 square metres in size will be exempt from the control of entry requirements. And, in order to prevent cherry picking of the most profitable areas of pharmacy business, an exemption will only be available to pharmacies providing a full and prescribed range of services, appropriate to local needs determined by the Primary Care Trust. We will consult on our proposal.

Similar arrangements and conditions will apply to pharmacies that intend to open for more than 100 hours a week, and to those that are part of a consortium to establish one of the new one-stop primary care centres proposed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Some patients prefer to get their medication through internet or mail-order based pharmacy services. For that reason we will now implement the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act 2001, subject to the range of services we want such companies to provide being agreed within the proposed new national contractual framework.

Our aim in all of these cases is to put the needs of patients first.

We will also reform and modernise the control of entry regulations to make them more business-friendly, to provide more certainty and reliability for companies who depend upon them and to make the process less time-consuming. This will include ensuring that decisions on applications are taken quickly by the Primary Care Trusts and that there is ready access to a sound appeals mechanism. Consistent with our approach to devolution within the NHS we will as soon as possible—assuming the pilots continue to demonstrate effectiveness—simplify the Local Pharmaceutical Services scheme by removing the need for Primary Care Trusts to obtain approval from the Department of Health.

We expect this package—including the new contractual framework—to improve the already high quality of pharmacy provision in England.

However, should problems of access or convenience arise in particular areas, the Essential Small Pharmacy Scheme will continue to be available, to ensure patients can access the pharmacy services they need.

We will consult on how these changes will be implemented, and expect to publish our consultation document at the end of August, giving a full 12-week consultation period for comment.

We will also form an Advisory Group, drawing on expertise from the pharmacy and medical world, the NHS, patient, consumer and competition interests, as well as those with a track record on regulatory reform, to advise on the details of implementation.

We will review progress in mid-2006, involving the OFT in this review, and publish our findings.

Taken together, we believe the measures that we propose today comprise a balanced package that will continue to raise standards for patients, will support the needs of small businesses, and will do so without jeopardising the vital role played by community pharmacies, particularly in poorer and rural areas.

Fur Trade (Domestic Animals)

The Minister for Trade and Investment (Mr. Mike O'Brien): The Government promised to report back to both Houses before the end of the Parliamentary session on investigations into the alleged import of domestic cat and dog fur into the UK.

The Government understand the ethical abhorrence felt about this issue. Our first concern was to try to establish the facts about the extent of this trade and the level of imports of these furs entering the UK. Unfortunately, UK import statistics do not give a clear indication of whether any of these furs are being imported into the UK.

We have faced repeated denials that these furs are entering the UK, whilst evidence that imports have come in has so far failed to show that this is happening on any significant scale, if at all. Clearly, there is a trade in such furs in some other countries. We need better evidence that it is a problem in the UK. We have been examining the options for reliable scientific tests for any products alleged to contain such furs, to ascertain reliably what animal the fur used in a particular product has come from. Such a test will be crucial in enabling Trading Standards officers to address any allegations of mislabelling that may arise under the existing Trade Descriptions Act, where manufacturers choose to label products containing fur. A reliable test of fur, to establish whether it is domestic cat or dog, would also enable the Government to determine more accurately the extent to which these products are entering the UK market.

We have asked scientific experts at the former Laboratory of the Government Chemist, LGC Ltd., to determine what testing methods are available. We have confirmed that DNA testing is subject to a number of uncertainties that make it unreliable as a testing method for these purposes (a paper has been made available in the Library of the House detailing these uncertainties). However, we have now identified a testing method based on "mass spectrometry" that we are more optimistic can be relied upon. LGC Ltd. is working on behalf of the Government to confirm the reliability of this method. We anticipate this work ought to be complete in the Autumn of 2003.

The Government has met interested parties to learn more about the facts of and concerns surrounding this trade. We have met Respect for Animals and the Humane Society of the United States to hear the details of their investigations into this trade. They have provided us with some anecdotal evidence of the situation regarding this trade, and have impressed on us their concern that action is taken to protect consumers, preferably at EU level. At this stage, our view is that we need more evidence of the extent of the problem, and we anticipate that these groups will shortly seek to provide that.

We have also met the British Fur Trade Association (BFTA), the Giftware Association, the British Apparel and Textiles Association and the British Retail Confederation to explore with them what their members know about this trade. All have said that their members are not knowingly importing or selling products containing domestic cat and dog fur at this time.

The British Fur Trade Association have also provided us with details of a voluntary labelling scheme that they will be introducing from 1 September 2003, in parallel with their counterpart organisations in the 14 other members of the EU and in Norway and Switzerland. The scheme will be available not only to BFTA members, who are importers of a comprehensive range of fur pelts, but also to companies that are not members. BFTA has written to all known companies selling fur garments and garments with fur trim in the UK with details of the fur labelling scheme and will actively promote its introduction. While I welcome this development, I recognise that because this scheme is voluntary in nature, it may not fully address public concerns on the specific issue of imports of domestic eat and dog fur.

The UK has also spoken to officials in several other countries where the possible trade in domestic cat and dog fur is a cause of concern. We have learnt from the US Government about the process that led to their introduction of a ban on these furs in 2000, and their experience in enforcing this ban. We have also discussed this issue with the Italian, Swedish and Danish Governments, and with the European Commission to learn from their approaches and to share the information we have gathered on this subject. Our inquiries show that hard evidence about the extent of the trade is difficult to come by.

Nonetheless we have a better picture of the issues surrounding this problem and the level of public concern it provokes, and the Government are prepared to take practical and proportionate action. Given the Single Market, any action on this issue will be most effective if taken at EU level. The European Commission has stated that Member States can take action at the national level.

I am therefore asking interested parties to try in the next six months to produce hard evidence of the extent of this problem in the UK and I am prepared, if such evidence can be produced, to support a ban on the import of domestic cat and dog furs. If, after six months, interested parties have not been able to produce hard evidence of the extent of this problem, the Government will say that it will not legislate until such evidence is forthcoming. In the meantime the Government will work to develop a test to enable enforcement of the Trade Descriptions Act where manufacturers choose to label a fur product and for use if we are able to legislate further.

Nuclear Materials

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): The Department will be placing the figures for the United Kingdom's stocks of civil plutonium and uranium as at 31 December 2002 in the Library of the House. In accordance with our commitment under the "Guidelines for the Management of Plutonium", we will also be sending the figures to the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), who will circulate them to member states in due course. The figures will be available on the Department's and the IAEA's websites.

The figures show that stocks of unirradiated plutonium in the UK totalled 90.8 tonnes at the end of 2002. Major changes from the corresponding figures for 2001 are a consequence of continuing reactor and reprocessing operations (e.g. as reflected in the increased quantity of "unirradiated separated plutonium in product stores at reprocessing plants". Other, smaller, changes are because of the return of MOX fuel from Japan and a review of reporting categories for some of the plutonium inventories concerned. The latter has resulted in plutonium present as "work in progress" at reprocessing plants being split so that separated material in the plutonium finishing lines is reported in the category "unirradiated separated plutonium held elsewhere" along with small quantities of plutonium in material forms for which current plans envisage re-cycle via reprocessing but which is not in the form of spent fuel.

International Accounting Standards

The Minister for Industry and the Regions (Jacqui Smith): On 26 November 2002 the consultation period on the possible extension of the European Regulation on the application of International Accounting Standards ("the Regulation") ended. The Regulation requires EU companies whose securities are admitted to trading on EU regulated markets to prepare their consolidated accounts on the basis of International Accounting Standards (as adopted by the European Commission) from 2005. The Regulation includes Member State options to extend its application to any other class or classes of company, and to the individual accounts of publicly traded companies, on either a permissive or a mandatory basis.

Having considered the responses to the consultation, I am announcing today that the Regulation will be extended by permitting publicly traded companies to use adopted International Accounting Standards in their annual accounts. All other companies will also be permitted to use adopted International Accounting Standards, in both their annual and consolidated accounts. Limited Liability Partnerships will be treated in the same way.

This approach is consistent with the UK's long held support of the idea of common, internationally accepted standards. Companies will be able to switch to International Accounting Standards based on their own circumstances, when the benefits outweigh the costs. No additional burden will be imposed; burdens on publicly traded groups may be reduced, as they will be able to use the same standards in both their consolidated and subsidiary accounts.

I have decided against mandatory extension for the time being, mainly because it would impose burdens. In particular, International Accounting Standards do not as yet offer a simplified regime for smaller companies comparable to that provided by the UK system. Also, International Accounting Standards are in a state of transition and their impact on companies' profits (and tax liabilities) is therefore uncertain at present.

None-the-less, it is clearly preferable that all UK companies use the same standards in due course. I therefore propose to review the impact of the Regulation around 2008 and decide if the time is right to move to mandatory use of International Accounting Standards. Time is needed for International Accounting Standards to become settled and established, for the development of a regime for smaller companies, and for companies and auditors to become more familiar with these standards.

My Department will consult by early next year on draft regulations to make necessary amendments to the Companies Act 1985.

Regional Development Agencies

The Minister for Industry and the Regions (Jacqui Smith): The Annual Reports and Accounts for 2002–03 for the eight RDAs outside London have been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library. These cover the period immediately following the introduction of the single Budget in April 2002. The Government welcome the achievements of the RDAs during the year.

Council of Science and Technology

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Office of Science and Technology undertook a quinquennial review of the Council for Science and Technology in 2002. I received the final report of the review in December 2002.

The Government broadly accept the recommendations of the review. Further work was however needed to decide how it should be followed up. That work is now complete. Copies of the final report of the review, together with details of the Government's plans for CST's future have today been laid in the Library of the House and published on OST's website www.ost.gov.uk.

Amongst other things, the Government have revised CST's terms of reference to make clearer the broad, cross-cutting nature of its remit. CST's new terms of reference are:

To advise the Prime Minister[1] on the strategic policies and framework for:

- sustaining and developing science, engineering and technology (SET) in the UK, and promoting international co-operation in SET;
- fostering the practice and perception of science, engineering and technology as an integral part of the culture of the UK;
- promoting excellence in SET education;
- making more effective use of research and scientific advice in the development and delivery of policy and public services across Government; and
- promoting SET-based innovation in business and the public services to promote the sustainable development of the UK economy, the health and quality of life of UK citizens, and global sustainable development.

The Council will work on cross-cutting issues of strategic importance, taking a medium to longer term approach. In developing its advice it will take into account the cultural, economic, environmental, ethical and social context of developments in SET.

[1]And possibly the First Ministers of the Devolved Administrations, depending on the outcome of discussions with those Administrations.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Sustainable Development (Government Estate)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): The Government intend to publish, the fourth part of the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate on Biodiversity at the end of July or early August. This will be available from the Sustainable Development in Government website. Copies of the website, on CD-Rom, will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Biodiversity section of the Framework breaks new ground as this is the first time that cross-Government targets have been set covering issues such as the condition of Government owned SSSIs, and a requirement for new building and refurbishment contracts to take account of biodiversity.

Our ongoing work on the Framework defines a set of cross-Government targets for Sustainable development, and outlines the mechanisms by which Departments will be expected to achieve them. These challenging targets give a clear indication of the Government's continued determination to take a lead in the practical implementation and achievement of Sustainable development.

The Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate can be viewed at www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/sdig/improving/index.htm

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Select Committee Chairmen (Pay)

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Peter Hain): Following the debate in the House on 14 May 2002 on the First Report of the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, HC 224-I, Session 2001–02, relating to Select Committees, the House resolved

"That, in the opinion of this House, the Review Body on Senior Salaries should be invited to consider what additional remuneration is appropriate for Chairmen of Select Committees".

The Review Body have now reported and I have today laid before the House a copy of their report entitled Pay for Select Committee Chairmen in the House of Commons (Cm 5673). Copies are available in the Vote Office and in the Libraries of the House.

I would like to put on record my thanks to the SSRB's Chairman (John Baker CBE) and its members for its analysis on the matter.

The SSRB has recommended an extra payment of £12,500 per annum to the Chairmen of departmental and externally focused "cross-departmental" select committees, stating that the final decision on which committees to include should be determined by the House itself.

The SSRB has also recommended that payment should not be implemented until the House has decided its approach to the issue of Chairmen's outside interests. I have asked the Chairman of the Committee on Standards and Privileges whether his Committee would look into the matter and report its findings to the House in the autumn.

Members will now have the summer recess to consider the report's recommendations. I intend to discuss the matter widely and reflect on Members' views before deciding on the terms of the motion to be put before the House in the autumn.

WALES

Student Support and Higher Education Funding

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): Following a request from the Welsh Assembly Government, the Government propose, subject to Parliamentary approval, to transfer to the National Assembly for Wales the remaining elements of higher education funding in Wales, namely:

> responsibility for student funding for higher and further education students domiciled in Wales, which is currently the responsibility of the Department for Education and Skills on an England-and-Wales basis; and
>
> full responsibility for the tuition fee regime, including powers over new policy as regards variable fees.

This means that the National Assembly for Wales will take on responsibility for providing financial support to students domiciled in Wales, regardless of where in the UK they undertake their higher or further education. In addition, the National Assembly will take on responsibility for determining the level of fees to be charged in Welsh institutions.

This will have the effect of ending the anomaly whereby the National Assembly for Wales has responsibility for higher education institutions but not higher education students. As we move to a situation where students increasingly contribute to the funding of institutions, this will become even more anomalous.

Powers to collect repayments of student loans from graduates through the tax system will continue to remain a UK Government responsibility, in common with the devolution system for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Most functions affecting higher education in Wales, including the funding of Welsh institutions, are already the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales. One exception is the student support system for higher education students, which is currently administered by the Department for Education and Skills both for England and Wales. Transferring these remaining functions in respect of Wales will therefore rationalise the existing split of responsibilities for higher education in Wales.

Student support is already devolved responsibility in both Scotland and Northern Ireland. Once the transfer of functions takes effect, Wales, like Northern Ireland

and Scotland, will have policy responsibility for determining the level of fees and their own student support packages.

I have been in detailed discussions with my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and the Assembly Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning on the principles underpinning this transfer and on the means for achieving it. The Government has already announced its intention to bring forward legislation to implement a number of the proposals in the recent White Papers, The Future of Higher Education and Widening Participation in Higher Education. The intention is to bring forward legislation which will provide the National Assembly with powers over the fees charged for higher education and over the support provided in higher education.

We have already announced our intention, subject to Parliamentary approval, for the relevant proposals in the Higher Education White Paper such as allowing Universities to set their own fees for individual courses and removing the barrier of students having to pay fees up front—to take effect from the 2006–07 academic year. We would envisage that the National Assembly for Wales should receive the necessary powers over the tuition fee regime in time for this. We also believe that September 2006 would also be the earliest admissions round for which it would be practical to transfer the student support system to Wales.

Our officials will continue to work on taking forward the detail of these proposals and reporting back when further details are available.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Volcanic Activity (Montserrat)

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Hilary Benn): Major volcanic activity took place on Montserrat between 12 and 14 July. This included a substantial collapse of the volcano dome, with associated pyroclastic flows and a number of explosions. Most of the volcanic flows have been to the evacuated eastern part of the island and out to sea. However, there has been heavy ash fall, and fall of rock fragments over all the inhabited parts of Montserrat. There are no reports of casualties or injuries. However, the ash fall has resulted in some damage to infrastructure plus substantial damage to crops and Montserrat's ecology. The ash has also affected other nearby islands and there has been some disruption to air traffic. The scientists monitoring the volcano advise that further activity, e.g. small explosions, can be expected in the next few days.

DFID is continuing to work closely with the Montserrat authorities. The Government of Montserrat is managing and co-ordinating a major ash cleaning programme. We will be assisting this, and are liaising with the Government and regional donor partners to assess immediate needs and provide appropriate responses. We will continue to keep the situation under close review.

DFID has provided substantial emergency and development assistance for Montserrat— over £180 million—since the start of the volcanic crisis in 1995, with a further £45.6 million between 2003–04 and 2005–06. We will continue to work with the Government of Montserrat to help achieve its ultimate goal of returning to self-sufficiency.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 14 July 2003

CABINET OFFICE

EU Regulations

Bob Spink: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many regulations originating from the EU have been implemented by the Department over each of the last five years. [120860]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office has been partially responsible for the implementation of one EU Directive in the past five years. The Women and Equality Unit, formerly part of Cabinet Office, implemented the Burden of Proof Directive (EC Directive 097/80/EC). However, the relevant statutory instrument, which came into force on 12 October 2001, was laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women, who has overall responsibility for women and equality issues.

Directive 97/80/EC has effect in relation to the UK by virtue of Council Directive 98/52/EC, and is implemented in the UK through the Sex Discrimination (Indirect Discrimination and Burden of Proof) Regulations 2001. Its aim is to ensure that any measures implementing the principle of equal treatment are made more effective, thereby providing victims of sex discrimination with effective access to justice. The Directive also defines the concept of indirect discrimination.

EC Regulations are, in general, directly applicable in the member states, without the need for further incorporation into national law. However, some Regulations require UK measures to make them workable and enforceable.

The total number of EC, ECSC and Euratom Regulations made over each of the last five years is estimated to be:

	Number
1998	2,852
1999	2,802
2000	2,882
2001	2,600
2002 (up to and including November)	2,125

It should be noted that many of these are small or technical Regulations to amend, implement or indeed repeal existing measures.

It would incur disproportionate cost to identify which Government Department was responsible for each of these Regulations. The Cabinet Office rarely has lead responsibility for EC Regulations.

Government Funding

Chris Grayling: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* Government agencies and *(c)* other public sector bodies were receiving funding from the Government in 1997; and how many are doing so in the current financial year. [124955]

Mr. Alexander: Information on non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), including the amount of Government funding each receives, has been published annually in the Cabinet Office "Public Bodies" publication. Data for the 1,128 NDPBs in operation across the UK as at 1 April 1997 are published in "Public Bodies 1997". The latest available data are available in "Public Bodies 2002". Copies of these publications are held in the House Libraries.

All Executive Agencies are Government funded, with the exception of Trading Funds, which are established using Government funds, but which become self-financing through their commercial activities. The June 1997 List of Ministerial Responsibilities shows 137 Executive Agencies and 87 are shown in the October 2002 List. These publications are held in the House Libraries.

Information on other bodies funded by Government is not collected centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Conflicts of Interest

David Davis: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on the basis for his assessment that it was prejudicial to the safety of the state to allow the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration to investigate whether Cabinet Ministers have ever had any conflict between their private interests and their public duties. [125679]

Mr. Alexander: The Government have made clear that they believe personal information provided by Ministers to their civil servants should be treated in complete confidence. The decision to issue a notice in this case was taken because the Government concluded that the release of certain personal, private information would not be in the public interest.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION

General Elections

Mr. Hammond: To ask the hon. Member for Gosport, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission whether the Electoral Commission is examining the case for changing the method of ordering candidates' names on ballot papers at elections. [125423]

Mr. Viggers: Yes. In its report, "Ballot Paper Design", published last month, the Commission indicated its concern that alphabetical discrimination could exist in multi-seat elections, while acknowledging that the information available at present was inconclusive.

The Commission intends to support further research to establish the extent of the influence of alphabetic discrimination prior to making a final recommendation to the Government. In the meantime it has recommended that legislation be introduced to enable the piloting of alternative listing methods in order to assist in determining the impact of the present arrangements.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Mr. Wood: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what action the Department is taking to boost humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan. [124618]

Hilary Benn: DFID allocated £44 million to support humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan last year. For the financial year 2003–04 we have allocated at least £5 million. This will be focused on aid to returning refugees and internally displaced persons and vulnerable, particularly women-headed, households. These are the largest groups in continued need of humanitarian assistance.

The humanitarian situation has improved over the last 12 months with good rainfall over the winter and early spring. This has ameliorated the effects of the persistent drought.

African Great Lakes

Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development when the Department will publish its joint strategy paper on the African Great Lakes region. [124937]

Hilary Benn: DFID intends to make publicly available in the next few weeks a short summary document on its overall strategy for the Great Lakes region. The individual strategies for Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda will be available at around the same time.

Colonial Widows and Orphans Pension Schemes

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what research he has commissioned into *(a)* the annual cost and *(b)* the numbers involved, if widows who married officers after they had retired from the Service were included in the Colonial Widows and Orphans Pension Schemes. [125227]

Hilary Benn: No research has been commissioned into the annual cost or the numbers involved. Such information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The accuracy of DFID's records on contributors to the various Colonial Widows and Orphans Pensions Schemes is entirely dependent on the individuals concerned, keeping us informed of any changes in their marital status. Our records are, therefore, not necessarily up to date in respect of marriages which took place after the contributor's retirement.

EU Aid

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if the Department will take steps to ensure that aid channelled through the EU that has until now been spent in the 10 EU accession states will from 2004 to 2006 be spent instead in *(a)* sub-Saharan Africa and *(b)* south Asia on *(i)* development and (ii) water, sanitation and hygiene improvements towards the Millennium Development Goals. [124441]

Hilary Benn: From 2004, the Pre-Accession budget will continue to provide funding for Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. Unallocated funds within the budget are being retained to handle any possible additional funding requirements for any new candidates up to 2006.

In 2004, Cyprus and Malta will join the Union and Turkey will move from the External Relations to the Pre-Accession budget. This will free up £150 million annually in the External Relations budget for new commitments.

Earmarking a sensible margin to support Iraq's reconstruction and the Middle East Peace Plan are a UK priority for the 2004 budget. The UK is also pressing for increased commitments to low income countries in Asia, particularly Afghanistan and support for the Global Health Fund, which would both help increase the European Commission's development budget poverty focus.

Assistance for sub-Saharan Africa is provided primarily through the European Development Fund (EDF), a separate off-budget fund replenished directly by member states contributions. Finds cannot be transferred between the EC budget and the EDF. Programmes under the EDF are based on the priorities of recipient countries and include water, sanitation and health programmes.

EU Committees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list *(a)* the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU committee on co-financing operations with European non-governmental development organisations in fields of interest to developing countries, *(b)* the number of times and the dates on which it has met since January 2002, *(c)* the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, *(d)* the decisions it has made since January 2002 and *(e)* the means used to communicate the decisions to the house. [110536]

Hilary Benn: The EC NGO co-financing committee does not have a fixed membership, but consists of delegates drawn from each of the 15 European Union member states. Since 17 April 2003, delegates from the 10 EU accession states have also been invited to attend most EU committees, including the NGO co-financing committee, as participating observers. The UK is usually represented on the EC NGO co-financing committee by one or two members of staff from the Information and Civil Society Department of DFID.

The committee has met three times since January 2002, on 19 September 2002, 21 January 2003 and 3 June 2003.

Agenda items considered on 19 September 2002 were:

Information on 2001/2002 activities, and call for proposals for 2002

Exchange of views on various co-financing instruments

For opinion: framework agreements (in respect of 2000 call for proposals)

Agenda items considered on 21 January 2003 were:

Approval of co-financing instruments and envelopes for 2003

Exchange of views on

Activities in 2002

New call for proposals 2003

Co-financing instruments and envelopes for 2003

Call for proposals for Framework Agreements in 2003

Principle of an information exchange mechanism and set-up

Proposal of rules of procedure for the NGO co-financing committee

Agenda items considered on 3 June 2003 were:

Policy orientations 2004–05 for budget line B7–6000

Exchange of views on

Proposals assessment based on concept notes

Role of the Committee and implications of the new financial regulation

Exchange mechanism with member states

Guidelines on principles and best practices for participation of non-state actors

Together with member states, the Commission has been conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of Comitology Committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". The Working Group on the Friends of Comitology is meeting later this month to discuss proposals for interim reform.

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the Committee. The second report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 10 January 2002 ref. 5060/03, COM(03)733.

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every Comitology Committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Human Rights

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what measures the Department is taking to promote human rights in *(a)* Cuba and *(b)* Afghanistan. [124368]

Hilary Benn: We do not have a bilateral government-to-government aid programme to Cuba nor do we have plans to develop one. As a member of the EU we support the EU Common Position on Cuba which requires the Government of Cuba to enhance democracy and safeguard human rights as a pre-condition for establishment of a formal framework agreement. This Common Position is now under review as part of a range of measures that the EU has implemented in response to the recent deterioration in human rights.

The promotion of human rights underpins DFID's strategy in Afghanistan. All our work seeks to promote human rights, and to improve Afghans' ability to participate in civic and political life. DFID aims to achieve this by supporting specific activities, such as livelihoods and humanitarian projects aimed at helping the most vulnerable, while also supporting the development of a democratic, inclusive state that can provide security and basic services to its citizens.

Human Trafficking

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what aid has been given to agencies to provide support and assistance to victims of human trafficking for sexual reasons; what discussions she has had with *(a)* European and *(b)* other counterparts on the issue; and if he will make a statement. [124848]

Hilary Benn: The trafficking of people is part of a wider set of issues related to the migration of poor people to better their lives, and to their vulnerability to national and international smugglers and traffickers. Trafficking is an international problem requiring co-ordinated action. DFID's role is to work to eliminate the poverty and social injustice that can lead to such abuse. Through our programmes to promote sustainable development and end poverty, DFID is helping to reduce the circumstances that give rise to this appalling trade, and which make women and children especially vulnerable. With other Government Departments, we are supporting the efforts of Governments and international agencies to strengthen social protection and justice in line with the international treaty framework covering these issues.

For example, in south-east Asia, we are supporting the International Labour Organisation's work to reduce the trafficking of women, many of whom would enter the sex industry, in Laos, Thailand, China (Yunnan), Cambodia and Vietnam. It involves a number of activities to raise awareness and prevent the trade. In the Balkans we recently supported the International Organisation for Migration in training the various agencies dealing with the victims of trafficking, including police, social workers and the legal profession, in order to create and disseminate models of good practice.

I have had to date no discussions with my counterparts on this specific issue.

Iraq

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on the provision of humanitarian aid in Iraq. [124429]

Hilary Benn: DFID has so far committed £154 million in the current crisis—including £35 million announced on 26 June in response to the United Nations Revised Humanitarian Appeal for Iraq of 23 June. Most of this finance is channelled through organisations such as United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and NGOs, which have the capacity

and expertise to mount operations quickly and effectively on the ground. A further £56 million is available to meet additional needs as they emerge.

On 3 July I placed in the Library of the House details of this funding, and the work that has been undertaken so far.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what proportion of the population in each district of Iraq is *(a)* homeless, *(b)* living in temporary accommodation and *(c)* living on food rationing. [124633]

Hilary Benn: Reliable statistics for homeless people and those living in temporary accommodation in Iraq are not available. It is estimated that, before the recent conflict, between 600,000 and 800,000 people were displaced in the north of Iraq, mainly from Kirkuk and Mosul, by the Saddam regime's Arabisation policies and inter-ethnic fighting; and between 100,000 and 300,000 Shia people were displaced in the south following the Gulf War and state-sponsored drainage of the marshes. Assessments are being made of displacement that has resulted from the recent conflict. These include Arab families who were living in homes now being reclaimed by returning Kurds; and a number of families rendered destitute by war damage and looting.

The Iraqi Ministry of Trade's Public Distribution System for food aid, which was re-launched on 1 June 2003, aims to distribute food rations to the entire Iraqi population of 27 million people. The World Food Programme estimates that the June ration reached about 95 per cent. of intended recipients.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what percentage of the population in each district in Iraq have *(a)* access to clean water in their homes and *(b)* full time electricity. [124634]

Hilary Benn: Reliable statistics are not available by district in Iraq. Maintaining both clean water and electricity supplies has been a high priority for the coalition since the end of the recent conflict.

In 2000, the World Health Organisation and UNICEF estimated that 48 per cent. of people in rural areas and 96 per cent. of people in urban areas had access to clean drinking water. The International Committee of the Red Cross has worked well with other humanitarian organisations, the UK military and local authorities to repair water facilities and provide water by alternative means while supplies have been disrupted, primarily by looting, after the recent conflict. The situation in many parts of the country, including Basra, Kirkuk and Mosul is now improving. Baghdad is now receiving 70 to 90 per cent. of its pre-war water supplies.

Electricity installations did not sustain significant damage during the recent war, but power supplies are very variable as a result of previous lack of maintenance and subsequent looting and sabotage. Generation capacity is estimated at 50 to 60 per cent. of the country's needs.

Media Training

Mr. Flight: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what the cost was to his Department of media and voice training for ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123119]

Hilary Benn: My department does not hold these costs centrally. However, in the last six financial years DFID is aware of spending on media and voice training only for officials as follows:

	£
2002–03	793
2001–02	0
2000–01	588
1999–2000	250
1998–99	0
1997–98	0

Notes:
The cost in 2002–03 and 2000–01 was for media training for one official in each year.
The cost for 1999–2000 represents voice coaching for two officials.

A more detailed answer could be obtained only at disproportionate cost as this would involve disaggregating the cost of media and voice training from the cost of other courses which may contain elements of media and voice training.

Middle East

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on the Department's assessment of the effectiveness of the principle of regional cumulation of goods in promoting *(a)* economic co-operation and *(b)* trade integration in the Middle East. [124172]

Hilary Benn: EU and Mediterranean partner trade ministers meeting in Palermo on 7 July 2003 agreed to extend the system of pan-European cumulation of origin to the Mediterranean partners (Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey). Cumulation of origin means goods can be processed using inputs from any source within the Euro-Mediterranean area, and take advantage of the system of preferential tariffs, which currently exists between Europe and the Mediterranean partners. As such, it should help to foster economic integration between Mediterranean partners and with Europe, enable goods to be produced more efficiently through sourcing the cheapest inputs, and encourage economies of scale. A subsequent assessment of the effectiveness of this agreement will eventually be possible.

Ministerial Meeting

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development which countries will be attending the Cancun Ministerial Meeting this September; and if he will make a statement. [124523]

Hilary Benn: We expect most, if not all, of the 146 members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to attend the 5th Ministerial meeting in Cancun in September. We recognise, however, that the ability and resources of some developing country members to

participate meaningfully in WTO negotiations can be limited. As a result, the Government have offered £40,000 to a WTO Trust Fund to enable Ministers and officials from the least developed countries to attend the meeting in Cancun.

More generally, the Government have committed to spending £45 million by 2004 on trade related capacity building. Activities funded include improving developing countries' ability to negotiate favourable deals in the WTO talks trade negotiations, helping them interpret trade agreements, and supporting them in taking advantage of new international trading opportunities.

Poverty Reduction Strategies

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development pursuant to the answer of 4 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 432W, if he will list the countries whose poverty reduction strategy papers now include sanitation, water supply and hygiene as a result of pressure from her Department. [124442]

Hilary Benn: Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are intended to be country-driven and owned, based on broad participation in their design, implementation and monitoring. PRSPs provide a focus for joint donor efforts, and so it is not possible allocate particular elements of countries' PRSPs to the actions of any one donor. DFID participates in formal and informal donor networks around PRSPs, has co-funded World bank-led workshops and has been active on PRSP preparation committees and working groups.

DFID's strong commitment to achieving debt relief and poverty reduction in the world's poorest countries means that we are working actively with their Governments to support production of PRSPs. We are also supporting the consultative process that the PRSP requires, to ensure the strategy is built on broad-based consensus in which the poor have a voice. The majority of DFID country offices support the national PRSP process by promoting official or Government participation. We also give direct support to civil society to strengthen the impact of public action on poverty, and to encourage progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. DFID has worked with the World bank on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Sourcebook. This is a guide to assist countries in the development of poverty reduction strategies and includes advice on issues such as health, education, infrastructure, water and sanitation, macroeconomic policy, gender and the environment.

DFID also supports major multi-lateral initiatives, such as the Water and Sanitation Program, that work to support national Governments and civil society in national PRSP processes. Research undertaken by the Water and Sanitation Program of Full and Interim PRSPs in Sub-Saharan Africa has found that treatment of water and sanitation is not comprehensive and often inconsistent. In particular, sanitation and solid waste management received inadequate attention. Also, despite the significant continuing work on sector reforms (e.g. decentralisation, rural and urban water and sanitation), their incorporation in the country PRSP initiatives requires considerable strengthening. The Uganda PRS was a notable exception having good coverage of water and sanitation issues, and serves as an illustration of good practice.

DFID has also commissioned a research and advocacy project in sub-Saharan Africa that is being undertaken by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and WaterAid. The project is investigating how resources allocated to water supply and sanitation in PRSPs in five countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Madagascar and Uganda) are converting into actual expenditure on water and sanitation, and will make recommendations to improve the poverty reducing impact of this work. This will be completed in 2004 and is an important opportunity to support the building of sustainable improvements in local capacity in a way that is consistent with nationally owned poverty reduction strategies.

Romania

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assistance the Department has given to Romania in each year since 1997. [124478]

Hilary Benn: The UK provides assistance to Romania through its' contribution to European Commission aid programmes and through a bi-lateral aid programme focused on Public Administration Reform, Social Policy Reform, Child Welfare Reform and Regional Development.

Details of assistance are shown in the following table.

Assistance to Romania in each year from, 1997

£ million

	UK Bi-lateral	*EC aid*	*Of which: UK share*
1997	5.71	76.54	14.54
1998	4.14	104.19	19.90
1999	3.74	150.63	26.74
2000	3.44	174.51	34.31
2001	5.39	345.12	65.23
2002	5.80	165.07	32.02

Europe and Central Asia Dept. 8 July 2003.

Uganda

Mr. Reed: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent assessment he has made of the humanitarian needs in Eastern Uganda as a consequence of the security situation. [125254]

Hilary Benn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) on 4 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 512W.

WTO Negotiations

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if the Government will make it their policy to support France's call for a moratorium on export subsidies during the current round of World Trade Organisation negotiations. [124318]

Hilary Benn: The UK has supported the French Africa initiative to the G8, which recognises the damaging effects of agricultural subsidies on African economies. Discussions around the French initiative during the recent G8 summit at Evian were also important to reiterate the importance of finding solutions to the commodities' problem and to improve the way in which preferential access into developed countries' markets operates for the benefit of developing countries.

In the WTO, the UK is committed to reaching agreements on long-term agricultural trade rules, which are fair and non-discriminatory. These multilateral rules should aim to create the stable conditions necessary for the private sector to make long-term investment in developing countries' agriculture. In this context, the draft agricultural trade framework agreement (put forward by Stuart Harbinson) proposes that developed countries phase out all export subsidies within 10 years.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what proposals her Department has for providing greater opportunities for poor countries competing for access to heavily protected markets in the developed world. [124319]

Hilary Benn: The Government believe that the current round of trade negotiations in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) will provide the best opportunity for improving developing country access to protected agricultural and non-agricultural markets in the developed world. Along with commitments to improve market access, the negotiations also aim to tackle developed countries' high levels of trade-distorting domestic support and use of export subsidies, which harm developing countries.

At the fifth Ministerial meeting of the WTO in Cancun this September, Ministers will assess progress towards achieving the 'development' agenda set out in Doha in November 2001. This includes an assessment of the merits of already tabled proposals on market access. Specifically, the EU is pushing for an overall average tariff reduction of 36 per cent. in the agriculture negotiations, and a reduction of tariffs on non-agricultural goods to a maximum of 15 per cent. The EU is also pushing for all developed countries to fulfil their commitment to grant duty and quota free access for all products excluding arms originating in least developed countries.

To ensure that trade rules benefit all individual developing countries, any new rules will have to consider the particular needs of countries in terms of development, food security and poverty reduction. For example, the current draft of WTO agricultural trade rules includes a number of special and differential provisions for developing countries, such as lower (subsidy and tariff) reduction commitments and longer implementation periods. Some provisions also aim to protect developing countries' food security by naming "special products" which would be subject to less market opening.

The UK is a strong advocate of trade reform and a supporter of special and differential rules for developing countries. The recently agreed package of CAP reform is important in delinking subsidies from production which will help reduce the unfair competition against third parties, particularly developing countries.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if she will make a statement on the consultations held between her Department and campaigners for fair trade before the fifth World Trade Organisation ministerial conference in Cancun. [124320]

Hilary Benn: As part of its continuing dialogue and consultation with UK non-governmental organisation and campaigners working on trade and development issues, DFID held its biannual open day to discuss these issues on 26 June 2003 and I spent an hour with campaigners to listen to their concerns about the expansion of the WTO negotiating agenda to include new issues such as investment. I also answered questions on the Government's position on various trade issues in the run up to Cancun. In addition to these formal consultations, DFID officials are in regular contact with campaigners to discuss the details of current policies and proposals.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if the Government will press its partners in the developed world to commit to quota and tariff-free access to European and US markets for all imports from low-income countries in Africa. [124321]

Hilary Benn: The UK was one of the strongest advocates of the EU Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative, which allows duty and quota-free access into the EU for imports from Least Developed Countries.

The UK is also very active within the G8 in finding ways to implement the Africa Action Plan, which include commitments to improve all existing preferential schemes, so as to ensure that these effectively benefit the targeted countries.

In the WTO, the UK supports the Commission's proposal that 50 per cent of imports from developing countries into the developed countries should be duty free—including those from African low-income countries.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what proposals the Government has to revive negotiations over the implementation of the Doha Agreements to improve the access to markets for developing countries. [124322]

Hilary Benn: The Government are working for faster progress in the Doha round, especially on the issues that matter most to developing countries: agriculture, Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and public health, and special and differential treatment. For example, we are in dialogue with the US and the pharmaceutical companies in order to find a way forwards on TRIPS and public health.

The agreed package of reforms to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy is an important step towards making global trade in agriculture fairer for developing countries. In the context of the WTO negotiations, now

that the EU has moved on agriculture, others must be prepared to follow suit. We hope that the CAP deal will inject new momentum into the Doha round.

The Government are committed to doing what we can to ensure the Cancun Ministerial delivers real benefits to developing countries and helps keep the round to the 1 January 2005 deadline for negotiations to be concluded.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Advantage West Midlands

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much funding Advantage West Midlands gave to projects in North Staffordshire in 2002–03; and what the *(a)* internal spending and *(b)* fundraising targets were for 2002–03. [122616]

Jacqui Smith: AWM funding to projects in North Staffs in 2002–03 was £19 million.

It is not possible to provide the fund raising targets for these projects. The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the expenditure on information technology by the Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary has been in each of the last five years. [124943]

Mr. Timms: The information is as follows:

	£
1998–99	40,266
1999–2000	119,255
2000–01	147,701
2001–02	595,927
2002–03	456,493

Due to the UKAEAC being a part of UKAEA all the IT services infrastructure is managed within the parent organisation's expenditure.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place a copy of the latest information technology strategy document for the Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary in the Library. [124944]

Mr. Timms: The document referred to is classified Restricted and contains information which could potentially be of use to terrorists. It therefore cannot be made publicly available "under exemption 1*(a)* information whose disclosure would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs; of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information."

BNFL (Safety)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what security considerations underpinned the decision to withhold from publication the full safety analysis conducted by BNFL of its building B30 at Sellafield. [124836]

Mr. Timms: It is not Government policy to disclose information relating to civil nuclear facilities which could potentially be of use to terrorist "under Exemption 1*(a)* information whose disclosure would harm national security—of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information." A version of the report which did not include such sensitive information was placed in the Libraries of the House in June this year.

Broadband

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the oral answer of the Minister for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services, of 3 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 527–28, in which areas schools with wireless broadband access have become hubs for the local community; what external sources of finance were used; and if she will make a statement. [124354]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 8 July 2003]*: Through the Alston Cybermoor project in East Cumbria, 600 homes are served by their local school connections, and a number of schools act as hubs in Co. Durham providing onbound access to both community, L. A. and business users. The Cumbria and Lancashire Education Online have also helped the small rural communities of Hawkhead and Coniston. The Buckfastleigh project is using a mixture of fixed-line and wireless connections. Jeff Joseph Sale Moor Technology College, Cheshire, has established an open-to-all wireless broadband access point located in a council house in the centre of a local estate. The wireless network is intended to give broadband access from anywhere in the college and up to 5km in to the local community.

Other areas are looking into the possibility of becoming hubs, e.g. Kent LEA. Pilots in Surrey and Isle of White are in the development stage.

All school wireless connections are government funded (Department for Education and Skills, and the DTI through the Regional Development Agencies), with non-school users only being charged for their share of the costs.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many new entrants to the Civil Service were employed in her Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 or over. [119818]

Ms Hewitt: The figures for my Department, based on headcount for the number of permanent staff, are as follows:

	Over age 50	*Under age 50*	*Total*
1997–98	49	389	438
1998–99	66	502	558
1999–2000	47	585	632
2000–01	110	666	776

	Over age 50	*Under age 50*	*Total*
2001–02	112	843	955
Grand total	384	2,985	3,359

These are the overall figures for the Department, including its Agencies and include permanent staff transfers into the DTI from: *(i)* other government departments and (ii) as a result of machinery of government change.

Compulsory Liability Insurance

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average cost of an employer's compulsory liability insurance claim was in each year since 1998. [119393]

Mr. Browne: I have been asked to reply.

The Department published a first stage report on employers' liability insurance that looked at the issue on 3 June. Copies are in the Library.

One of the key external stakeholders representing the insurance industry was the Association of British Insurers (ABI). They have calculated the average cost of Employers' Liability claims using historical patterns to estimate the settlement cost of claims which are currently outstanding. Their estimates are as follows:

Estimated cost of outstanding claims

	£
1998	11,900
1999	13,100
2000	12,700
2001	16,000
2002	16,200

Digital Broadcasting

Liz Blackman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department has taken to publicise good practice in inclusive design and *(b)* provide data, guidelines and case studies relating to inclusive design to those involved in the design and production of (i) digital television products, (ii) digital radio products and (iii) telecommunications products. [111166]

Mr. Timms: The Department is committed to encouraging good design and this is done principally through our involvement in standards work. The placing of accessibility features in standards ensures that all products of that type include them. We actively participate in drafting key standards. A major conference was held earlier this year by the European Standards Bodies in conjunction with the Commission to promote inclusive design.

A task listed in the Action Plan of the Digital Television Project, jointly led by DTI and DCMS, is to "address human factors issues including access for disabled people". The DTI commissioned a scoping report from Loughborough University in 2002 and has commissioned follow-up work with Scientific Generics Limited including a report on inclusive design which is due in Q3, 2003. On 10 July 2003, DTI hosted an Intellect seminar on Digital Terrestrial Television Product Usability which was attended by a number of key manufacturers of television receivers. "Usability for All" was the main theme of the seminar.

Liz Blackman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department has had with manufacturers of digital radios on improving the accessibility of this equipment for visually impaired people. [111168]

Mr. Timms: DTI officials have regular discussions with manufacturers of radio receivers on the development of digital radio technology, applications and markers. Although UK sales of digital radio receivers have increased in recent months, the market is still at a very early stage. We expect to see a greater range of receivers on offer over the coming months, including those with larger clearer screens, which will make digital radio programmes more accessible to all, including visually impaired people. Options being considered by manufacturers for the figure include digital radios with audio guides which read alound what is currently displayed as text.

Access to digital radio services is not limited to the current range of digital radio receivers. Many digital radio services can also be accessed by digital television receivers and computers, providing a greater range of options for the visually impaired and others.

As noted in my reply to my hon. Friend's Question No. 111167, OFCOM will have powers to act to further the interests of consumers on such issues as ease of accessibility.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the provision of electricity from coal fired power stations displacing power from plants that are more environmentally friendly; and what efforts are being made to encourage the use of electricity from environmentally friendly plants in the future. [123282]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 8 July 2003]:* The choice of which generating plant to use to meet their contracts with electricity suppliers is a commercial matter for the electricity generating companies.

Electricity generators face limits imposed by the environment Agency on a variety of emissions with environmental impacts. Examples of emissions limited by the Agency in this way include sulphur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen, emissions of which are generally higher from coal plant than from other types of generation.

Coal fired generation also produces higher levels of carbon dioxide emissions than most other forms of generation. The Agency does not set limits for emissions of carbon dioxide from power stations. However, a trading scheme for carbon dioxide emissions is due to be launched by the European Union in January 2005. This scheme will cover all fossil fuelled power stations and will give generators direct financial incentives to reduce carbon emissions.

Our February 2003 Energy White Paper sets out our strategy for using competitive markets to reconcile environmental considerations with the electricity needs of homes and businesses. The White Paper stated that,

"we will make the new trading scheme a central plank of our future emissions reduction policies, through which the traded carbon market can set a signal for the value of carbon reductions in the economy".

Although there are at present no direct incentives on electricity generators to reduce carbon emissions, we have put in place a number of other policies to encourage environmentally friendly forms of generation. The most significant of these policies are *(a)* the Renewables Obligation, launched in April 2002, which encourages electricity suppliers to contract for increasing quantities of power from renewable sources and *(b)* exemption from the climate change levy of electricity from renewable source and from good quality combined heat and power plant.

The electricity sector has made significant progress in reducing environmentally harmful emissions over the past decade. Between 1990 and 2002, its emissions of carbon dioxide fell by about 20 per cent. and between 1990 and 2001 its emissions of sulphur dioxide fell by about 73 per cent. (figures for 2002 are not yet available). By contracts, emission of carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide from all other sources over the same periods fell by 3 per cent. and 62 per cent. respectively.

EU Contracts

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she is taking to reduce the procedural requirements involved in bidding for EU public sector contracts. [125298]

Jacqui Smith: The UK has taken an active part in the negotiations on the European Commission proposals to simplify, clarify and modernise the existing public procurement directives. The proposals have just completed their second reading by the European Parliament. Once adopted, the new public procurement directives will provide an up-to-date framework within which efficient and non-discriminatory procurement can take place.

Everything but Arms Agreement

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 3 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 329W, on the Everything but Arms agreement, if she will assess the impact of the Everything but Arms agreement on trade exports to the United Kingdom by non-least developed countries in sub-Saharan Africa. [124219]

Ms Hewitt: Comparing figures for calendar year 2000 with the year to March 2003 shows trade exports to the United Kingdom by non-least developed countries (non-LDCs[1]) in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) increased by 27 per cent. to £5.15 billion. Over the same period, the total value of exports to the United Kingdom from least developed countries (LDCs) in SSA increased by 82 per cent. though still at a relatively low level of £265 million. We hope to see these figures grow further as their economies adjust to the greater export opportunities offered by EBA, which came into effect in March 2001.

[1] Non-LDCs in SSA are: Senegal, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon, Central African Republic, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Swaziland, South Africa, Namibia, St Helen, Seychelles, British Indian Ocean Territories, Mayotte and Mauritius

Innovation Budget (Textiles)

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the projects supported by her Department's Innovation Budget involving technical textiles. [121944]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has supported the following individual technical textile projects under the Innovation Budget:

Innovative non-woven rail foundation materials that will help to drain rainwater and stabilise the rail track-bed.

Durability of geosynthetics to investigate the durability of geotextiles used in road construction.

Flexible fire barriers that are light and strong to replace traditional construction materials.

Conductive materials including 'qwerty' keypad for use as pressure sensors.

Electrically conductive fabrics for use in the "wearable computer"

Technical textile bandages which provide a measured pressure to help treat leg

Venous ulcer patients and to prevent deep vein thrombosis in long flight passengers

Technical textile-based limb protectors and ballistic helmets, to provide lighter and stronger equipment for the armed forces and police

Double cloth technology—to develop the capabilities of double cloth weaving for use in various fibres

Fire resistant polypropylene yarns for use in cheap carpets and furnishing fabrics used in public spaces

Hybrid laminates from adhesive thermo-bonding Universal insulation system to provide an improved balance in performance clothing between comfort and protection from heat

Laser seaming of performance textiles to provide cloth seams of predictable and consistent strength

Impact-resistant non-wovens for use as motorcycle protective clothing and body armour

Fire resistant fabrics based on rare animal fibres that combine high performance with luxury finish for example in aircraft and yachts

Designing advanced fibre ropes, e.g. for mooring oilrigs in very deep waters

Technical textile CAD, develop and implement a Computer Aided

Engineering (CAE) system in the technical textiles sector

Textile-reinforced composites

Warp/weft-knitted fabrics with metal wire content, for electromagnetic shielding that can fit around bodies

Novel lap joint for non-wovens, which ensures the join is as strong as the rest of the material

Long-staple yarn for technical textile applications, combining the best properties of natural and man-made fibres in high-strength materials

3D seamless flatbed knitting with various applications e.g. in healthcare: seamless whole body bandages for burns victims and other skin treatments

3D nonwovens—A project that will allow manufacturers to predict more closely the porosity and weight of a finished product such as a dust filter

Technical Textile Project Co-ordinator, to help companies find partners and funding for R and D

National Advisor on Technical Textiles to the industry-led Textile and Clothing Strategy Group

Technical textile database, in order to help suppliers and manufacturers in the industry find partners for commerce and R and D.

Media Training

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost was to her Department of media and voice training for Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123138]

Ms Hewitt: There has been no cost to the Department for media and voice training for Ministers since 1997.

For DTI officials, the majority of the Department's training budget is allocated to individual Directorates. Each Directorate has responsibility for managing, monitoring and evaluating at training events in line with the Departmental business and training plans. Disproportionate costs would be incurred to collate the data centrally for the purposes of answering this question.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost was to her Department of mobile phones supplied to Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123144]

Ms Hewitt: Responsibility for the provision of mobile telephones for official purposes and for payment of the associated call charges was devolved to individual directorates, agencies and NDPBs at the end of March 1993. Since August 1997, the DTI has increasingly made use of the central Mobile Telecommunications contract managed by the Office for Government Commerce. This contract provides a call-off arrangement for DTI users at advantageous prices ensuring that the Department obtains good value for money. Due to the devolved responsibility for mobile telephone management the only information that can be provided at non-disproportionate cost is expenditure with DTI's main suppliers of mobile telephony.

The figures available are:

	£
1998	90,881
1999	263,123
2000	226,695
2001	342,964
2002	342,881

Figures are not available for 1997 due to a change in the Department's Accounting System over that period.

Post (Lost Items)

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many lost items of post there have been *(a)* so far in 2003 and *(b)* in each of the last five years. [125196]

Mr. Timms: This is an operational matter for Royal Mail Group plc, I have therefore asked the Chief Executive of Royal Mail to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Post Office

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effect on the level of subsidy payable to post offices if the number of Post Office card accounts opened exceeds the Government's estimates; and if she will make a statement. [125271]

Mr. Timms: Government financial support for the Post Office network is not affected by any particular number of Post Office card accounts. Universal banking went live in post offices on 1 April 2003 as scheduled. There is an effect on payments to the Post Office through its contracts with government departments, but the Post Office is now providing electronic access to a wide range of bank accounts and is looking to extend these further.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices have closed in Leicester since 1997; what research has been done by her Department into the closure of post offices in Leicester; and what representations she has received from honourable Members concerning the closure of post offices in Leicester. [125272]

Mr. Timms: Decisions on post office closures are an operational matter for Post Office Ltd and I have asked the Chief Executive to respond directly to the hon. Member about closures in Leicester. In addition to representations from the hon. Member for Leicester East, my hon. Friend has received one representation from Leicester city council.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the biomass fuel burnt under subsidy as an energy resource in the last 12 months came from *(a)* new sources of material, *(b)* material that would otherwise go to waste and *(c)* raw materials that can serve a useful purpose in industry; what the expected figures are for (i) 2005 and (ii) 2010; and if she will make a statement. [125164]

Mr. Timms: In 2002 the following amounts of biomass fuel were used in the UK. Biomass used for electricity generation may be eligible for support under the Renewables Obligation or the Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation and Climate Change Levy exemption.

Thousand tonnes of oil equivalent

	Electricity generation	*Heating purposes*[1]
Wood waste	—	266
Wood	—	204
Poultry litter, meat and bone, straw, farm waste and short rotation coppice	283	72

Thousand tonnes of oil equivalent

	Electricity generation	*Heating purposes*[1]
Municipal solid waste, general industrial waste and hospital waste	672	91

[1] No payments are made under the Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation, the Renewables Obligation or the Renewables (Scotland) Obligation for the burning of biomass fuels for the provision of heat.

Source:
Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics.

A more detailed breakdown is not available because it would disclose data for individual companies that are given to the Department in confidence. Only short rotation coppice is classed as "new sources of material". Information on the amount of wood and wood waste that could be used by industry as a raw material is not centrally available, but the Forestry Commission is currently undertaking a Woodfuel Resource Study. Estimates for 2005 and 2010 are not available.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 5 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 298, on renewable energy, if she will to meet the Director of the Wood Panel Industries Federation to discuss the impact on the industry of subsidised biomass fuel. [125280]

Mr. Timms: As the Minister for Energy I am in discussion with the Chairman of the Trade and Industry Select Committee about a meeting with a deputation of MPs and representatives of the Wood Panel Industries Federation to discuss the impact of the Government's renewable energy policy on UK wood-based panel manufacturing.

Occidental Jetty

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultation she has had with *(a)* the owners of the Occidental Jetty on Canvey Island and *(b)* others on future uses of that jetty in connection with the production of energy from wind. [123415]

Mr. Timms: None, although my officials are aware of local press speculation on this subject.

Selby

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the assistance given by the Department in respect of redundancies at the Selby coal complex; and what the redundancy terms are. [125238]

Mr. Timms: On 16 July 2002 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced the Government's intention to pay £10 million to UK Coal plc to support redundancy payments arising from the announced closure of the Selby coal mine complex in North Yorkshire by spring 2004, with the loss of approximately 2,000 jobs. The Government is providing this support as aid to cover exceptional costs under Article 7(2) and 7(3) of the Council Regulation on State aid to the coal industry. The European Commission gave formal approval to the state aid on 27 May 2003. A first instalment of £1.8 million was paid to UK Coal in June. The assistance will allow UK Coal to extend pre-privatisation redundancy terms to affected employees until March 2005.

The Government have also set up a regeneration programme for the local area, implementing the agreed recommendations of the report by Lord Haskins, Chairman of the Selby Coalfield Task Force.

Small Businesses

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in establishing a one-stop shop for the allocation of public funds grants and advice for small businesses. [124435]

Nigel Griffiths: As a result of feedback from key stakeholders, DTI has reviewed the support it offers to business. A simpler, more effective set of business support products is being put in place. A new web-based 'Business Support Directory' also provides information to customers and intermediaries on all of the current business support schemes and new business support products.

Street Works

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 9 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 268W, on street works, what the agenda was for the discussions with telecom operators; what representations were made to her Department; what decisions were made; and if she will make a statement. [109560]

Mr. Timms: The discussions covered a number of regulatory issues of concern to the operators, including the impact of the proposed changes to streetworks legislation on the development of broadband. It was agreed that any new streetworks legislation should have regard not only to increased cost and disruption to the transport system, but also to the compliance cost on telecoms operators and their customers, and in particular its potential to distort or restrict competition in the telecoms market. The regulatory impact assessment required for any new legislative proposals will need to address these issues.

Telecommunications and Broadcasting

Liz Blackman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether her Department has produced a policy statement on inclusive design in relation to consumer equipment in the *(a)* telecommunications and *(b)* broadcasting sectors; and if she will make a statement. [111167]

Mr. Timms: The powers and duties of OFCOM under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and the current Communications Bill will enable it to act decisively to further the interests of consumers and the community as a whole. I am sure that the benefits of inclusive design will be one area that OFCOM will be keen to encourage.

Wood

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what research has been undertaken on the possible distortion of the wood supply market in the UK as a result of the Renewables Obligation; and if she will make a statement; [125113]

(2) what measures she is taking to discourage the burning of wood products used in industry as a raw material as a subsidised biomass fuel for energy production. [125116]

Mr. Timms: The Forestry Commission, working with others, are currently undertaking a Woodfuel Resource Study, which will quantify the resource from traditional forests, sawmill co-product, arboricultural arisings and short rotation coppice. Defra and the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) have funded studies on the quantity and location of recovered wood.

As a result of market pressures, the forestry industry has been investigating alternative end uses for its products. The forest industry regards energy generation using wood as an important new market to explore.

I am aware that generators are also investigating the possibilities presented through the use of non-wood materials as a source of biomass for use in co-firing. At present, large co-firers are testing the feasibility of using wood as well as imported olive cake and palm oil husks.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are being taken to promote the use of wood wastes with no commercial value as a biomass fuel. [125114]

Mr. Timms: The Government are providing support for the use of wood waste as a biomass fuel in a number of ways, as outlined in reply on 24 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 683W and 26 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 927W. This will help to deliver the Government's policy objectives on national energy production. The support schemes do not apply to other uses of wood waste.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research she undertook prior to the introduction of the Renewables Obligation into its impact on the wood panel industry. [125170]

Mr. Timms: We carried out three full consultations on the Renewables Obligation before its introduction on 1 April 2002. The first consultation paper, "New and Renewable Energy: Prospects for the UK for the 21st Century", was issued in March 1999 and was accompanied by Supporting Analysis produced by ETSU . The report presented an up to date status report on new and renewable energy and flagged up issues concerning forestry wastes and also the socio-economic implications of renewables.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with representatives of the wood panel industry regarding the impact on their supplies of basic raw material of electricity generators using wood residues as a green fuel. [125171]

Mr. Timms: My officials are facilitating work between representatives of the UK wood industry and co-firing power stations to explore the opportunities offered by co-firing under the Obligation for UK Forestry, and, in particular, the potential for using by-products from existing wood industries. Working groups continue to meet.

It is hoped that this initiative, if successful, will have the dual benefit of reducing imports and making more biomass available for a larger market in the UK, thereby helping to stabilise prices.

We understand from the forestry industry that it can meet demand from power generators from existing surplus forestry material.

TRANSPORT

Air Safety

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many incidents there have been in each of the last five years of objects falling from commercial airlines over the UK; and how many falling objects have caused *(a)* personal injury and *(b)* damage to buildings in each year. [125341]

Mr. McNulty: During the 5-year period from 1 January 1998 until 31 December 2002 there were 309 reports to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) of objects falling from commercial airlines. A breakdown for each of the years is shown in the following table:

	Minor personal injury	*Third party building damage*	*Total objects*
1998	1	21	54
1999	0	32	66
2000	1	36	68
2001	1	19	59
2002	0	27	62

Airports

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total cost was of the consultation exercise on airports policy. [123863]

Mr. McNulty: Since July last year to date, "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom" consultation is estimated to have cost around £4,200,000, inclusive of VAT.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received about airport expansion. [125479]

Mr. McNulty: The national consultation ended on 30 June. We estimate that at least 300,000 responses have been received from across the UK. This includes formal responses, questionnaires, petitions and other representations.

Buses

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many local bus passengers there were in each year since 1998–99 in *(a)* London, *(b)* English metropolitan areas, *(c)* English shire counties and *(d)* England. [125343]

Mr. McNulty: Information on the number of local bus passenger journeys in each year since 1998–99 in each of the areas of England is published by the Department in Table 10 of "A Bulletin of Public Transport Statistics GB, 2002 edition". The publication is available in the Libraries of the House and on the Department's website at www.transtat.gov.uk/tables/2002/pts/pts.htm.

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the public subsidy is for 2003–04 to local bus services for *(a)* London, *(b)* English metropolitan areas, *(c)* English shire counties and *(d)* England, separately identifying the (i) concessionary fare subsidy and (ii) fuel duty rebate. [125345]

Mr. McNulty: Local transport authorities make their own decisions on the amount to be spent on supporting local bus services and subsidising concessionary fares. No forecasts of the totals expected for the current year are available. However, the figures for 2001–02, the last year for which information is currently available, were:

Public transport support for local bus services[1]

	£ million
London	193
English met areas	122
English shires	138
Total England	453

[1] Includes administration costs and expenditure met from the Department's grant schemes

Concessionary fares reimbursement (for local buses)

	£ million
London	122
English met areas	194
English shires	131
Total England	447

Expenditure by my Department in the current financial. year on payments to bus operators in England of Bus Service Operators Grant (formerly called fuel duty rebate) is forecast to total £335 million, of which about £75 million is expected to be to London operators. No estimates are available of the split of this expenditure outside London between operators in metropolitan areas and shire counties.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the financial assistance given by the Government to local authorities for the implementation within their areas of concessionary bus fares. [125500]

Mr. McNulty: In England about £450 million per year is spent by local authorities on concessionary travel by bus. That expenditure, along with other costs falling on local authorities, is covered by the contribution that the Government makes to local authorities through the annual grant settlement.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average number of passengers carried by a bus in general public service was in the last year for which figures are available. [125746]

Mr. McNulty: The average number of passengers carried by a local bus in England was nine in 2001–02, the latest year for which a figure is available.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average number of passengers travelling at any one time on a bendy-bus was in the last year for which figures are available. [125747]

Mr. McNulty: The average number of passengers travelling at any one time on a bendy-bus in London is 24.

Car Travel

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average number of people travelling in a car on public roads was in the last year for which figures are available. [125751]

Mr. Jamieson: The National Travel Survey shows that in the three years 1999–2001 the average car occupancy was 1.6 people per car on public roads.

Driving Tests

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the performance of the Driving Standards Agency booking hotline for practical driving tests; how many telephone calls have been received on average per day by the Driving Standards Agency booking hotline for practical driving tests; how many staff are employed to handle calls to the Driving Standards Agency booking hotline for practical driving tests; and what the average waiting time has been for allocation of *(a)* a driving theory test and *(b)* a practical driving test by the Driving Standards Agency. [125290]

Mr. Jamieson: The Driving Standards Agency has a single national telephone number for booking theory and practical driving tests. Over three quarters of those who call the number reach a call centre agent, and 93 per cent. of those who get through speak with an agent within 20 seconds.

During 2002–2003, some 13,730 calls a day were made to the Driving Standards Agency's national practical test booking telephone line. The Agency currently employs some 220 call centre agents to handle calls for practical test bookings.

During 2002–2003, 99 per cent. of theory test candidates got an appointment at their preferred test centre within two weeks of their preferred date. During the same period, the national average waiting time for a practical driving test was 7.8 weeks.

Maritime Safety

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what revisions he proposes to make to maritime safety procedures off the West Coast of Scotland, with particular reference to the sinking of the Jumbo on 29 June. [125258]

Mr. Jamieson: We await publication of the report by the Marine Accident Investigation Branch into this incident and will consider carefully any recommendations for improving maritime safety procedures.

Motorway Speed Limits

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 8 July 2003, ref 123834, if he will place in the Library the assessment his Department has made of the road safety implications of increasing motorway speed limits. [125186]

Mr. Jamieson: The assessment carried out in 2001 into the possible effects of raising the motorway speed limit was an internal review of the available evidence. In its evidence to the Transport Select Committee on Road Traffic Speed, the Department gave both oral and written evidence to support its conclusion that the current motorway speed limit should be retained. The Select Committee's Report refers to this information together with other evidence. These documents are already available in the Libraries of the House.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the environmental implications of increasing motorway speed limits to 80 mph. [125187]

Mr. Jamieson: The assessment carried out in 2001 showed that any increase in the motorway speed limit would result in an increase in both emissions and noise.

Rail Accident (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* investigations and *(b)* inquiries he will conduct into the incident at Charlton, Worcestershire on Monday 7 July involving a mini-bus and First Great Western train; and if he will make a statement. [125052]

Mr. McNulty: There is an on-going British Transport Police (BTP) investigation into the accident at the Pools user worked level crossing, at Charlton in Worcestershire on 7 July involving a minibus and a First Great Western high-speed train. The Health and Safety Executive is providing technical support to the BTP-led investigation.

Network Rail is carrying out a full internal investigation into the cause of the accident, to ensure that any lessons are learned to minimise the risks associated with this type of level crossing.

Rail Freight

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact the decision to cut funding for rail freight schemes will have on the environment. [125511]

Mr. McNulty: Suspension of the freight grant schemes was a short-term budgetary decision. The Strategic Rail Authority plan to reopen the Freight Facility and Track Access Grant schemes in the autumn for spend from April 2004, subject to available funding.

Rail Safety

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new safety standards have been put in place following the Hatfield rail disaster. [124486]

Mr. McNulty: Following the Hatfield derailment, Network Rail (then Railtrack), the infrastructure controller, made two significant changes to the way railway maintenance safety standards are managed on the railways. The first specified more detailed and prescriptive requirements for the inspection and rectification of rails exhibiting rolling contact fatigue. The second involved the implementation of more stringent requirements for general track inspections to enable better monitoring of rail condition.

Network Rail is fundamentally changing the way it manages rail maintenance. Its New Maintenance Programme ensures that Network Rail decides what work is completed and when. Network Rail is also taking direct control of three maintenance contract areas. This will give Network Rail clearer control of the works being completed and will help provide a safer, more reliable and efficient railway infrastructure.

Rail Travel

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the percentage of train passengers who travel to and from stations by *(a)* car and *(b)* taxi. [125748]

Mr. McNulty: The National Travel Survey shows that, in the three years 1999–2001, where surface rail was the main mode of transport, a car was used for 30 per cent. of trips to travel to and from the station. A further 6 per cent. of trips involved the use of a taxi or minicab.

Railways

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has *(a)* to refurbish railway stations and *(b)* to replace track from Liverpool Street to Romford. [125374]

Mr. McNulty: Network Rail are responsible for the maintenance and renewal of all railway infrastructure, including track. They have a continuing programme of track maintenance and renewal between London Liverpool Street and Romford. Stations are being repainted along this section of line by the train operator. Further work on stations is being discussed in the negotiations for the letting of the Greater Anglia rail franchise.

Regional Airports

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the countries which have *(a)* agreed, *(b)* failed to agree and *(c)* not responded to his predecessor's statement of 10 June 1998 on multilateral agreements on 3rd and 4th freedoms at regional airports. [125342]

Mr. McNulty: Officials wrote to our bilateral aviation partners in June 1998 proposing to lift all capacity restrictions on services between UK airports, other than London Heathrow and London Gatwick, and points in the other country by airlines of both sides.

The responses to the offer are:

(a) accepted the offer

Bahrain
Belarus (subject to finalising air services agreement)
Bulgaria
Cameroon
Fiji
Hong Kong SAR
Jamaica
Jordan
Republic of Korea
Malaysia
Maldives
Mexico
Namibia
Pakistan
Qatar
Sri Lanka (not yet implemented)
Tanzania
Turkmenistan

(b) rejected the offer

Armenia
Australia (to be considered as part of liberalisation talks)
Azerbaijan
Bangladesh
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Egypt
Georgia
Indonesia
Iran
Japan
Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan (originally rejected, but now reconsidering)
Lebanon
Malawi
Mauritius
Moldova
Mongolia
Myanmar
Nigeria
Oman (originally accepted, but subsequently reconsidered)
Saudi Arabia
Seychelles
Singapore (initially rejected, but capacity on all routes now unlimited)
Syria
Thailand (replied—still considering offer)
Ukraine
Vietnam
Yemen

(c) no reply

Algeria
Antigua & Barbuda
Argentina
Chile
Congo Democratic Republic
Cote d'Ivoire
Cyprus
Ethiopia
Gabon
Ghana
Hungary
India
Israel
Kenya
Kuwait
Morocco
Nepal
Philippines
Russian Federation
Senegal
Sierra Leone
South Africa (new offer made)
Sudan
Turkey
Uganda
Zambia
Zimbabwe

(d) We did not write to the following countries because the air service arrangements do not specify capacity or frequency limits, which in our view provides unlimited access to UK regional airports:

All European Union Member States

Angola
Bahamas
Barbados
Bolivia
Canada
Costa Rica
Czech Republic
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
El Salvador
Estonia
Latvia
Lithuania
New Zealand
Poland
Rwanda
Slovakia
Switzerland
Tunisia
United Arab Emirates
United States of America
Uruguay
Uzbekistan

(e) Due to political and/or aviation bilateral considerations, we have not made the regional access offer to the following countries:

Afghanistan
People's Republic of China
Colombia
Gambia
Iraq
Liberia
Libya
Macao Special Administrative Region
Taiwan
Tajikistan

Road Safety

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the effect of providing lighting on the whole of the motorway system on the number of recorded accidents. [125344]

Mr. Jamieson: No estimate has been made of the effect of lighting the whole of the motorway network. Research has shown that where motorway lighting is provided the number of reported accidents can be reduced by about 8 per cent. and can result in a reduction of night-time personal injury accidents by as much as 30 per cent.

Lighting is generally only provided where there are particular problems and where the economic assessments show the cost of installation and operation of lighting is exceeded by the benefits of reduced night-time accidents. At present, approximately 30 per cent. of motorways are lit.

Roads

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many trunk road projects are proposed; [125512]

(2) if he will make a statement on the progress with improving the road system. [125513]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department is only responsible for road projects in England outside London. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State's, statement to this House on 9 July made clear our commitment to improving the nation's roads and other forms of transport, in both the immediate and the longer terms.

The Government's Target Programme of Improvements currently contains 72 major trunk road improvement proposals tackling congestion, providing safety benefits and relieving communities of traffic. Since June last year, 12 other major trunk road schemes have been opened. A number of other major trunk road improvements have been proposed, mainly through the multi-modal study process. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's announcement covered 11 of these studies. The Highways Agency have been asked to do further development work on over 30 road proposals, includingactive traffic management and other technology related improvements on various parts of the motorway and trunk road network. Similar work is also being carried out on other projects following our responses to eight other multi-modal studies within the last two years.

Since December 2000, over 60 major road schemes, often bringing safety and quality of life benefits, have been proposed by local authorities and received provisional or full approval by the Government to proceed. We are expecting around 20 further such proposals to be submitted as part of this year's Local Transport Settlement process.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what the backlog of road maintenance is in England; [125514]

(2) what estimate he has made of the total cost of the local road maintenance backlog. [125710]

Mr. Jamieson: There is not a backlog of maintenance on motorways and trunk roads in England.

On local roads the maintenance backlogs were estimated in 2000 as £2 billion on carriageways and footways, £750 million on bridges and other structures, and £1
billion on street lighting. Since then the Department, through the Roads Liaison Group, has been developing better inventory systems and condition indicators that will allow more accurate and up to date estimates to be made of backlogs.

The Government is committed in the 10 Year Plan for Transport to tackling all the backlogs in local road maintenance by 2010 and is providing £31 billion of funding over the Plan's period for this purpose.

Streetworks

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to release a consultation paper on streetworks legislation. [126022]

Mr. Jamieson: We have held a series of consultations in recent years as part of revisions to the secondary legislation governing utility street works under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. Most recently, consultation ended on 27 June on a revised version of the "Code of Practice for the Co-ordination of Street Works and Highway Works".

Officials in my department have also held a series of consultative meetings recently with representatives of utility companies and local authorities about possible changes to the legislative framework governing utility works which might be included in a forthcoming Traffic Management Bill.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many extra trains will be able to run carrying passengers on the West Coast main line following the upgrade. [125752]

Dr. Howells: The West Coast Main Line Strategy, published by the Strategic Rail Authority in June 2003, provides for an 80 per cent. increase in the route's capacity for long distance passenger trains

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the anticipated rate of profit or loss on the West Coast mainline upgrade investment is. [125759]

Dr. Howells: The West Coast Main Line Strategy, published by the Strategic Rail Authority in June 2003, estimates the passenger and freight benefits of the upgrade investment to be more than twice the costs.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Athletics

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to promote increased participation in athletics in schools and sports clubs in England. [125324]

Mr. Caborn: Athletics is benefiting from the Government's investment of over £8 million on building new, and strengthen existing, links between schools and sports clubs. This investment will build on the existing physical education and sport opportunities available to all young people in schools and increase opportunities for participation in national governing body affiliated, or otherwise accredited, clubs offering high quality sporting experiences.

Digital Broadcasting

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the proportion of homes in *(a)* the North West of England, *(b)* Cumbria and *(c)* South Lakeland which are unable to receive the Freeview service; and if she will make a statement. [119255]

Estelle Morris: The information is not available in the form requested. The Independent Television Commission has produced a UK digital terrestrial television (DTT) coverage update including a coverage map. I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The broadcasters have established databases which give coverage predictions by postcode for DTT across the UK. These can be consulted via the websites: www.dtg.org.uk; www.freeview.co.uk.

EnglandNet Project

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of the total cost to her Department of the implementation of the EnglandNet project. [124770]

Mr. Caborn: The total cost of the EnglandNet project is as follows:

£

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*Total*
DCMS grant-in-aid funding via ETC/ VisitBritain	769,000	265,000	852,000	1,886,000
Capital Modernisation Fund	50,000	550,000	0	600,000
Invest to Save Fund	0	1,328,000	2,077,000	3,405,000
Total all funding	819,000	2,143,000	2,929,000	5,891,000

In addition, £300,000 from the capital modernisation fund has been spent to enable tourist information centres to get connected to the internet, and thereby be able to use the extranet provided by EnglandNet, and £150,000 from the invest to save budget has been used to support work on e-business awareness and training for tourism businesses in rural areas.

Gambling

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans the Government have to legislate on the gambling industry; and when she plans to publish a White Paper on this matter. [125028]

Mr. Caborn: The White Paper, "A safe bet for success" (Cm 5397), was published in March 2002.

We will bring forward legislation on the gambling industry as soon as Parliamentary time permits. We also intend that Parliament should have an opportunity to give our proposals pre-legislative scrutiny, and plan to publish draft clauses to that end.

IT Projects

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what major IT projects with a value in excess of £10,000 she authorised expenditure on in each of the last three financial years. [125715]

Mr. Caborn: Decisions on authorisation of expenditure are taken by the appropriate project or programme board. The word "authorised" has been interpreted to mean having an approved business case.

The major IT projects which this Department took forward in each of the last three financial years are:

2002–03

Golden Jubilee Website

Golden Jubilee Awards Database

Redevelopment of the Department's website

Redevelopment of the Department's Intranet

Development of a staff skills database

A pilot of Electronic Document and Records Management (on-going)

2001–02

Export licensing system

Replacement of HR system

2000–01

Technology refresh

Correspondence tracking

Public appointments

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the Department spent on IT *(a)* licences, *(b)* maintenance, *(c)* software and *(d)* hardware in the last financial year. [125733]

Mr. Caborn: DCMS spent £284,885 on software, which includes the costs of any licences, £146,174 on maintenance and £223,116 on hardware in the last financial year.

Lottery Awards

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many lottery awards there were to organisations in the Poole constituency in each year since 1997; and what the average number of awards per constituency was in each year. [125036]

Estelle Morris: The number of lottery awards made in Poole, and as a constituency average across the UK, is shown in the table.

Year	*Poole*	*Constituency average across UK*
1997	12	22
1998	10	13
1999	21	31
2000	20	36
2001	21	31
2002	23	39
2003	8	15

Note:

The figures for 2003 refer to the period between January 1 and June 30.

Major Sporting Events

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the major sporting events hosted by the UK and funded by UK Sport in each year since 1996–97 to the provisional programme for 2003–04. [125560]

Mr. Caborn: The following events were hosted by the UK and funded by UK Sport in each year since 1996–97 along with the provisional programme for 2003–04.

1996–97

No events

1997–98

No events

1998–99

World Cross Country Championships

1999–2000

European Show Jumping Championships

World Disability Water Ski Championships

European Europe Class Sailing Championships

World Judo Championships

World Indoor Climbing Championships

European Sports Aerobics Championships

European Three Day Event Young Riders Championships

European Junior Badminton Championships

Pre Olympic and Pre European Boxing Championships

Pre Olympic Women's Hockey Championships

Junior European Target Championships (Archery)

2000–01

Modern Penthalon World Cup Qualifier

Finn Gold Cup Sailing

Canoe Marathon World Cup

Spar European Athletics Cup

European Young Riders Championships

World Track Cycling Championships

Rugby League World Cup

European Badminton Championships

World Curling Championships

World Grand Prix Gymnastics Finals

World Netball Youth Cup

European Junior Top Twelve Table Tennis Championships

World Indoor Bowls Ladies Singles Championships

2001–02

World Amateur Boxing Championships

Canoe Marathon World Championships

World Half Marathon Championships

Commonwealth Shooting Federation Championships

World Modern Pentathlon

2002–03

World Indoor Athletic Championships

2003–04

World Badminton Championships

European Dressage Championships

World Disabled Badminton Championships

International 420 Class Sailing Championships

World Triathlon Cup

European Cross Country Championships

European Junior Swimming and Diving Championships

Millennium Commission

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to her answer of 12 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 31W, on the Millennium Commission, which of the major projects have received money from local authorities; how much was spent on each of the projects; when the money was spent by the local authorities on those projects; and if she will make a statement. [125989]

Tessa Jowell: I will write to the hon. Member in my capacity as Chair of the Millennium Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

National Lottery

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how the revisions to the National Lottery system will affect the distribution of funds to seaside resorts. [124764]

Estelle Morris: The changes to the lottery announced on 3 July 2003 include proposals to make it easier to apply for funding, to involve the public in how lottery money is spent and to make sure it's spent wisely. This should encourage people to play the lottery which, in turn, will provide revenue for the good causes and benefit all areas. Since the introduction of the 1998 Lottery Act and changes to policy directions, distributors have increasingly focussed on areas of social and economic deprivation including seaside resorts. The National Lottery has funded, and continues

to fund, numerous projects which bring widespread benefits to many seaside communities across the country.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with the Department for Education on protecting school playing fields. [124880]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State discussed school playing fields issues with her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on 24 June 2003.

In addition, DCMS officials and those from the Department for Education and Skills have had regular discussions on playing field matters.

These discussions have informed the Government's strategy for protecting school playing fields.

Sports Funding

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* ministerial colleagues in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and *(b)* the Local Government Association about the provision of sporting facilities run by local authorities; and if she will make a statement. [125259]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State discussed the provision of local authority sporting facilities with representatives from the Local Government Association (LGA) on 11 June.

A number of recommendations to improve delivery of sport by local government were put forward in Game Plan, the Government's strategy for delivering sport and physical activity objectives. This Department is committed to working with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the LGA towards achieving these objectives.

Tourism

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assistance is available to develop areas of sustainable tourism; and if she will make a statement. [124753]

Mr. Caborn: Sustainable tourism is relevant to all tourism areas, including coastal resorts, historic and modern cities, rural areas and man-made visitor attractions. We set out the policy framework necessary to achieve progress in the Tomorrow's Tourism strategy. To implement sustainable tourism requires action by a wide range of partners, including Government Departments and their agencies, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), local authorities, the tourism industry and organisations with environmental, conservation or social exclusion remits. Actions initiated by DCMS include giving VisitBritain a remit to market England to encourage domestic tourism and the 'Fitness for Purpose' initiative to provide customers with a firmer assurance that hotels, and the restaurants within them, are fit for trading. RDAs are promoting sustainable tourism as part of their enhanced role in the strategic leadership of tourism, which links with their statutory remit for sustainable development. Local authorities can help promote sustainable tourism through spatial planning and approaches to visitor management and Business Links provide practical guidance to tourism businesses on matters such as energy efficiency and reducing waste. Everyone has something to contribute towards achieving sustainable tourism in every part of the country and it is in everyone's interest to do so.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps her Department is taking to ensure that the Access All Areas programme is being promoted in all tourist areas. [124762]

Mr. Caborn: Access All Areas is a nation-wide award scheme run by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Launched in May 2003, the scheme runs until September, and aims to recognise and congratulate small businesses and organisations, of all types, which offer accessible and innovative services for disabled people. Through DWP's efforts the scheme has been promoted by VisitBritain, both on its web site and in an e-mail newsletter sent to 200,000 tourism businesses, and by the Tourism Skills Network, who advertised the award on its web site. DCMS sponsors VisitBritain as the lead body for tourism, and has communicated Access All Areas to those responsible for accessible tourism in England's regional tourist boards.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what type of marketing procedures have been used to promote VisitBritain to local communities. [124765]

Mr. Caborn: VisitBritain uses a range of corporate communication tools to inform local tourism communities about its activities, including e-mail, a dedicated trade website, press releases, a quarterly corporate newsletter, press and trade-dedicated information leaflets and brochures. It also provides regional tourist boards, and other destination marketing organizations, with feature articles for use in their own communications.

VisitBritain's representatives regularly meet tourism businesses at regional events and hold trade surgeries throughout the country.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much she estimates will be spent by her Department on funding the e-commerce impact assessment on the UK tourism sector. [124771]

Mr. Caborn: The e-commerce impact assessment on the tourism industry was commissioned and managed jointly by this Department and UK Online for Business. This study was one of a series assessing the impact of e-commerce on more than 50 key sectors, all of which were funded by UK Online for Business. The costs for this study, including consultancy, printing, dissemination and publicity were approximately £68,000.

Tourism (Disability Access)

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans her Department has to introduce an indicator for disability access friendly services within the tourism sector. [124767]

Mr. Caborn: The Tourism For All National Accessibility Standard was agreed in 1993 as a mechanism for assessing the accessibility of tourist accommodation, both serviced and self-catering, and to help operators promote these facilities. It was reviewed, expanded and relaunched as the National Accessible Scheme in 2002.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what types of incentives are available for tourism-related small businesses that are renovating their premises to improve access for people with disabilities. [124768]

Mr. Caborn: In October 2004 the final phase of Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 comes into force. Organisations that provide a service to the public, which includes most small businesses in the tourism sector, are required to tackle physical features that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a disabled customer to use their service.

However, the DDA only requires service providers to make "reasonable" adjustments. The Act allows flexibility for service providers in considering how to make their services accessible to disabled people. All circumstances would be considered when interpreting what is "reasonable", including the cost of an adjustment, its practicality, and the extent of a service provider's resources. What might be considered reasonable for a national hotel chain may not be so for a small guesthouse. Financial incentives should not therefore be needed, apart from the clear business case for providing good service for disabled people and their family and friends, whose overall annual spending power is estimated at £45 billion.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Bovine TB

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cattle were slaughtered owing to bovine TB in each year since 1997 *(a)* in Shrewsbury and Atcham and *(b)* in Shropshire. [123694]

Mr. Bradshaw: The data requested are not available for the parliamentary constituency of Shrewsbury and Atcham. However, the number of cattle slaughtered under bovine TB measures in Shropshire, from 1997 to 2002, is given in the following table:

Number of cattle slaughtered in Shropshire under bovine TB control measures 1997–2002[1]

	Number of cattle slaughtered
1997	28
1998	40
1999	36
2000	221
2001	120
2002	48

[1] TB Reactors plus direct contacts.

Note:

In 2001, the TB testing and control programme was largely suspended due to the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak. Since testing resumed in 2002, resources have been concentrated on herds with overdue TB tests, which would have had a longer period in which to contract the disease. Also, the proportion of high risk herds being tested post-FMD is greater than that prior to the outbreak. As a result, the number of TB reactors identified and slaughtered in 2002 is not comparable to those identified and slaughtered in previous years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of cattle herds in *(a)* the south-west region and *(b)* England and Wales suffered an incidence of bovine TB in *(i)* 1999, (ii) 2000, (iii) 2001 and (iv) 2002. [124314]

Mr. Bradshaw: The table provides information on the incidence of bovine TB in *(a)* State Veterinary Service (SVS) west region and *(b)* England and Wales between 1999 and 2002. There is no SVS south-west region, but west region, which includes the counties listed, covers the south-west of England.

Area TB herd incidence 1999–2002[1]

Percentage

	1999	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
(a) West region	4.04	4.82	5.96	7.35
Avon	2.58	3.70	7.41	5.97
Cornwall	3.67	4.70	5.55	7.97
Devon	2.93	3.49	5.79	5.50
Dorset	2.31	1.18	3.74	4.27
Gloucestershire	8.82	10.85	9.47	14.64
Hereford and Worcester	6.40	7.65	9.17	11.70
Shropshire	0.22	1.72	2.37	3.29
Somerset	2.71	4.35	3.45	4.88
Wiltshire	6.77	5.20	6.02	8.55
(b) England and Wales	2.55	3.14	4.19	4.52
England	2.63	3.29	3.94	4.78
Wales	2.15	2.47	5.10	3.61

[1] Confirmed new herd incidents as a percentage of tests on unrestricted herds.

Note:

In 2001, the TB testing and control programme was largely suspended due to the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak. Since testing resumed in 2002, resources have been concentrated on herds with overdue TB tests, which would have had a longer period in which to contract the disease. Also, the proportion of high risk herds being tested post-FMD is greater than that prior to the outbreak. As a result, herd incidence in 2002 is not comparable to that of previous years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress in respect of the TB Forum; and when it is expected to reach conclusions. [124316]

Mr. Bradshaw: The remit of the TB Forum is 'to consider new measures which might be taken to control TB in cattle'. The Forum is a consultative group, with no formal advisory or decision making role. It is the main vehicle for informing key interest groups on developments on policy in bovine TB and it provides a sounding board for exploring new policy options. The Forum met last on 23 June 2003.

The EFRA Committee in its report on Badgers and Bovine TB, Seventh Report of Session 2002–03, recommended that members of the Forum should reassess what role it should play and that Defra should consider redefining its remit. In its response, published on 24 June 2003, by the Committee as the Eighth Special Report of Session 2002–03, the Government explain that relationships between the Government and

stakeholders will be addressed in light of the Animal Health and Welfare Interim Strategy and in the development of a new TB Strategy.

Consultation Documents

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the consultation documents issued by her Department in each of the last four years; what the cost was of producing each of these; how many documents were issued in each consultation; and how many responses were received in each consultation. [124574]

Alun Michael: Defra believes that policy development should be carried out in close consultation with stakeholders. Formal consultation documents are only part of this process, which can also include, for example:

- stakeholder meetings;
- listening events/public meetings;
- web forums;
- public surveys;
- focus groups;
- regional events;
- free-phone and freepost surveys and events;
- targeted leaflet campaigns; and
- roadshows and exhibitions.

The specific information requested is not collated centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, a list of all written consultations exercises carried out by Defra since its formation, including copies of the documents, can be obtained from the Department's website at: www.defra.gov.uk in the section entitled "Consultations".

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she has entertained Labour hon. Members at public expense in the last 12 months, and at what cost. [106387]

Margaret Beckett: I have not done so.

EU Committees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU Committee on Statistics relating to the trading of goods with non-member countries, the number of times and the dates on which it has met since January 2002, the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, the decisions it has made since January 2002 and the means used to communicate these decisions to the House. [110496]

John Healey: The Committee on Statistics relating to the trading of goods with non-member countries does not have a fixed membership, but consists of delegates drawn from each of the 15 member states. Delegates from the 10 EU accession states attended the last meeting as active observers. The UK Government are represented by officials from HM Customs and Excise, occasionally accompanied by an official from the Office for National Statistics, depending on the agenda.

Since January 2002, the Committee has met five times on:

- 7 March 2002;
- 27 to 28 June 2002;
- 14 to 15 November 2002;
- 12 to 13 March 2003; and
- 25 to 26 June 2003.

Agenda items considered and decisions made by the Committee since January 2002 all relate to the implementation, interpretation and application of EC legislation dealing with the collection of extra EC trade statistics. The main items under discussion by the Committee during the period in question have been the impact of EU enlargement, actions relating to the collection, processing and dissemination of data and work programmes intended to improve data quality.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament is ensured by the regular EU scrutiny process: documents which fall within the Scrutiny Terms of Reference are deposited within Parliament along with an Explanatory Memorandum for examination by the Scrutiny Committees.

Together with member states, the Commission has been conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to 'simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission'. The Working Group on the Friends of Comitology is meeting later this month to discuss proposals for interim reform.

The Commission is obliged to publish an annual report on the workings of the Committees. The latest report (Com (2002) 733 final, dated 13/12/02) has been published and was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 10 January 2003.

The UK Government have also encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Information Technology

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much she spent on IT *(a)* maintenance, *(b)* licences, *(c)* software and *(d)* hardware in the last financial year. [125717]

Alun Michael: During the financial year 2002–03, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (excluding Agencies and NDPBs) spent £6,225,184 on IT maintenance, £308,342 on licences, £3,910,025 on proprietary software and £12,088,211 on hardware (including operating system software on PCs and servers and first year maintenance where appropriate). The software spend includes some licence costs, which cannot easily be identified without disproportionate cost.

These figures include payments to Fujitsu Services Ltd., with whom the Department has a framework contract, of approximately £4,090,033 on IT maintenance, £320,000 for licences, £1,500,000 for proprietary software and £11,866,000 for hardware purchases.

Marketing Budgets

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 2 April 2003, *Official Report,* column 767W, on marketing budgets, if she will place evaluations of the campaigns funded in the Library. [124722]

Mr. Bradshaw: Regarding general consumer information on organic food, no evaluation is available since the possibility of providing such information is still under consideration. As was said in the response to the question from the Member for Bridgwater, direct funding is not available from Defra to support advertising campaigns.

On the marketing of organic and other quality agricultural products under the Rural Enterprise Scheme, funding is offered to individual businesses or representative organisations to assist with marketing initiatives. These projects are commercial in nature and the information is treated as confidential. Expected outcomes from these, and all other Rural Enterprise Scheme projects, are considered as part of the scheme's application assessment process against published aims for the scheme and to ensure that the Government investment achieves good value for money. The performance of each project is monitored during its lifetime to ensure agreed output targets are achieved. The effectiveness of RES support will be evaluated as part of Defra's normal policy evaluation programme.

Certain information on individual awards made under the Rural Enterprise Scheme can be provided by Defra on request. More detailed information about projects which are likely to be of particular public interest are announced through Defra News Releases, available on the Government News Network website.

Ministerial Visits (Scotland)

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times she has visited Scotland on official duties each year since 2000; and what meetings were held on each occasion. [103616]

Margaret Beckett: I visit Scotland from time to time on official duties. In line with Exemptions 2 and 7 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings or their content, as some of these discussions may have taken place on a confidential basis.

Overseas Trips

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the overseas trips made by *(a)* herself, *(b)* her ministerial team and *(c)* departmental staff in each month since 1 October 2002, broken down by (i) the participating Ministers, (ii) the destination of the trip, (iii) the purpose of the trip and (iv) the cost of the trip. [117534]

Margaret Beckett: I and members of my ministerial team make frequent overseas trips at EU and UN fora and more widely in pursuit of Defra business. The Government publish an annual report of ministerial travel overseas. All travel by Defra civil servants is conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Civil Service Management Code. The detailed information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Rights of Way

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated cost in total is of completing the mapping exercise under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. [123406]

Alun Michael: The cost of implementing Part 1 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 in England was £13.5 million to the end of March 2003.

The Countryside Agency has estimated that the remainder of the mapping exercise including contractor costs, staff and publicity will require a further £22.1 million. This is an estimated cost and there are still large external factors to be taken into account, such as the number of comment forms received from the public which need to be determined and the number of appeals to be heard. These variables could have a large impact on the final costs of the mapping exercise.

The Planning Inspectorate has spent £1.5 million up to the end of March 2003 and has a budget of £2.5 million this year. It is not possible to give a total cost for the Planning Inspectorate as this will depend on the number of appeals received.

Information on costs in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Telecommunication Masts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many planning applications have been made to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department. [124814]

Alun Michael: Since August 2001, when the current planning regulations on mobile telecommunications masts came into force, there have been three planning applications (relating to one site only) and no applications for prior approval to locate mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department.

Village Grants

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received about Vital Village grants; and if she will make a statement. [124884]

Alun Michael: We have received 14 representations from MP's and members of the public about uncertainty that was caused by the temporary hold the Countryside Agency put on decision making in the Vital Villages grant programme.

The Countryside Agency lifted the hold on decision making in the first week of July 2003 and is now assessing grant applications.

The Agency tells me that the hold was put in place in order to decide how to cope with a very high demand for grants. High demand for the Vital Villages grant scheme is a feature of its success, but the Agency has reviewed its priorities and will ensure that those communities in most need receive support.

PRIME MINISTER

Department for International Development

Gregory Barker: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues in the last six months regarding the future of the Department for International Development as an independent Department; and if he will make a statement. [125352]

The Prime Minister: I have regular meetings with ministerial colleagues and others on a wide range of subjects and will continue to do so. As with previous Administrations, it is not my practice to provide details of confidential discussions, under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Child Guardianship

Tim Loughton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many children are awaiting decisions from CAFCASS on whether they should be removed from the care of their parents or guardians. [120370]

Margaret Hodge: The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) does not make the decision to remove children from the care of their parents or guardians, or hold hearings on future guardianship. Court hearings are held to determine these questions. A CAFCASS practitioner represents the interests of a child during proceedings. The court considers all the evidence before it, including CAFCASS reports, and makes the decision about the child's future. At the end of April 2003, CAFCASS were dealing with 12,245 public law cases (care, adoption, freeing orders and guardianship) that were at various stages between application and final hearing. Information on how many children are awaiting hearings on future guardianship is not held centrally and could not be collected without incurring disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what forum he intends prosecutions for human rights abuses, genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Iraq be tried. [125026]

Mr. Rammell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 3 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 246W.

No decision has yet been made in what forum prosecutions for human rights abuses, genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Iraq will be tried.

We believe that it should be for the Iraqi people to decide whether and how to bring to justice those who have committed crimes against them, with suitable international help.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his memorandum to the Foreign Affairs Committee of 16 June, which documents were examined which were found to be forgeries; which documents on Iraq's alleged uranium procurement are under consideration; and if he will make a statement on the procedure being used to distinguish between genuine and forged documents. [123655]

Mr. Rammell: We understand that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) acquired documents on this subject in February 2003. These documents did not originate in the United Kingdom. Some of these turned out to be forgeries. We have now seen the documents passed to the IAEA and agree that some of them are forgeries. Others are still under consideration. We do not know the precise origin or history of these documents.

I cannot comment on procedures to distinguish between different documents or on the documents themselves, as it is the longstanding policy of successive governments not to comment on intelligence matters.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the good and unforged evidence that Iraq sought materials from Niger mentioned by Sir Jeremy Greenstock in his interview with David Usborne of the Independent was passed to the International Atomic Energy Authority. [124906]

Mr. Rammell: The evidence referred to by Sir Jeremy Greenstock does not derive from UK sources. We have encouraged all states to make available to the International Atomic Energy Agency any evidence which they possess.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the UK Government have officially informed the International Atomic Energy Authority that they do not concur with its conclusions on allegations that Iraq sought to procure substantial quantities of uranium from Africa. [124927]

Mr. Rammell: No. We have, however, made a number of public statements to the effect that we believe that there is good evidence to support our assertion that Iraq tried to procure uranium.

Mr. Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 16 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 46–7W, on visas (Syria), how many *(a)* applications

from students and *(b)* entry clearance applications to *(i)* visit the UK and (ii) settle in the UK were approved in each year. [123903]

Mr. Mullin: I regret that the figures in my answer to my hon. Friend on 16 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 46–7W, were not accurate. The correct figures are as follows:

In the calendar year 2000, the British embassy in Damascus received 815 student applications. Of these, 535 visas were successful. In the financial year 2001–2002, 845 student applications were received and 502 visas were issued. In the financial year 2002–2003, 657 student applications were received and 432 visas were issued.

The number of visit visa applications received in Damascus in the calendar year 2000 was 5,720. Of these 4,263 were successful. In the financial year 2001–2002, 3,758 applications were received and 3,525 visas were issued. In the financial year 2002–2003, 5,068 applications were received and of these 4,208 were successful.

In the calendar year 2000, our embassy in Damascus received 140 settlement applications. Of these, 71 were successful. In the financial year 2001–2002 165 applications were received and 178 visas were issued. This apparent discrepancy is due to the fact that applications can be carried forward from one month to the next before being resolved. In the financial year 2002–2003, 368 applications for settlement in the United Kingdom were received. Of these, 280 were successful.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the UK Government is taking to promote human rights in Iraq. [124110]

Mr. Rammell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Phil Sawford) on 23 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 558W.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the UK Government is taking to ensure implementation of the UN General Assembly Resolution 57/232 on deployment of human rights monitors. [124112]

Mr. Rammell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) on 20 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 471W.

Arms Exports

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in which countries Ministers in his Department conducted arms promotion activities in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 to date; and if he will make a statement. [112293]

Mr. Straw *[pursuant to the answer, 15 May 2003, Official Report, c. 403W]:* An administrative error led to an omission in my answer of 15 May to the right hon. Member. The correct answer should read as follows:

Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers regularly conduct overseas visits in the course of which they promote British exports, including those of defence equipment. For 2002, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers carried out such promotion activities in Chile, India, and Singapore; and in 2003 to date, Singapore. In 2002, Ministers also carried out promotion in the Czechoslovakia Republic, Slovakia and Tanzania, but while in the UK. In 2003, Ministerial promotion also took place in India, but while the Minister was in the UK.

Bali

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what intelligence his Department received in advance of the terrorist attack in Bali of 12 October 2002; whether this was reflected in advice to travellers on the Department's website; and if he will make a statement. [124979]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the statement given by my right hon. Friend, the Foreign Secretary to the House on 21 October 2002, *Official Report*, columns 21–24.

EU Committees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials in the Department serve on EU committees or working parties. [116089]

Mr. MacShane: Membership of EU Committees and Working Parties is not fixed. Depending on the subject matter under consideration, the most appropriate policy officials, including those on the staff of the UK Permanent Representatives, therefore attend the meetings of EU Committees and Working Parties. Given the wide-ranging and fluctuating nature of the subject matter, attendance can vary significantly from meeting to meeting. The precise details of attendance are therefore not available, and would incur disproportionate cost to compile.

Guantanamo Bay

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the US administration on the timescale for the construction of court rooms at Guantanamo Bay. [124228]

Mr. MacShane: None.

We continue, however, to press the US to resolve the position of the detainees.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on proposals to construct an execution chamber at Guantanamo Bay. [124229]

Mr. MacShane: We are not aware of a US decision to construct such facilities.

The US is aware of the UK's fundamental opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations have been made to the US administration on the future of detainees held at Guantanamo Bay. [124230]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to the Statement given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Chris Mullin) on 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 751.

We continue to press the US to resolve the position of the detainees in Guantanamo Bay.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ask the US to set a date for bringing to trial the detainees held at Guantanamo Bay. [124231]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to the Statement given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Chris Mullin) on 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 751.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on *(a)* the total number of UK citizens who are prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay, *(b)* their country of origin, *(c)* how many have been returned to their country of origin and *(d)* what their ages are. [124233]

Mr. MacShane: The British Government are not party to this information as a matter of course.

I understand, however, that there are approximately 680 detainees of 42 nationalities in Guantanamo Bay of which 3 are under 16. 9 of the detainees are British. I also understand that 41 detainees have been released by the US Government.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received from human rights organisations on the treatment of detainees who are UK citizens at Guantanamo Bay. [124234]

Mr. MacShane: There is regular contact between the FCO and human rights NGOs, including on the question of the detainees in Guantanamo Bay.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will reply to the question from the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South tabled on 18 June. [125640]

Mr. Rammell: My hon. Friend received an answer to his question on 10 July. I apologise for the delay.

Piracy

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many recorded incidents there were of piracy and armed robbery on the seas around the British Isles during the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [125228]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

There has been no recorded incidents of piracy or armed robbery on the seas around the British Isles in the last five years. The United Kingdom Government have taken positive steps to identify and deal with the problem of piracy against ships at sea. This includes readily available guidance to UK seafarers and ship owners on how to avoid or deal with acts of piracy.

Qatar

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when since 1 January 1999 Ministers in his Department have held meetings with the Government of Qatar; which Ministers in his Department attended each of these meetings; and where each of these meetings was held. [123014]

Mr. Rammell: FCO Ministers frequently meet members of the Qatari Government. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary last met the Foreign Minister of Qatar on 14 April in Doha.

Syria/Iran

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to *(a)* Syria and *(b)* Iran on the fate of missing Israeli service personnel; and if he will make a statement. [124591]

Mr. Rammell: We condemn hostage taking under any circumstances and have made a number of representations to governments in the Middle East about the missing Israeli servicemen. On each occasion we emphasise that hostage taking is wrong and that those holding hostages should free them at once. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary last raised the matter with Iranian Foreign Minister Kharrazi on 6 February 2003 and my hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Mike O'Brien) raised it with Syrian Foreign Minister Shara'a during President Al-Assad's visit to the UK on 16 and 17 December 2002. We have also raised the issue with Hizbollah.

United States

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the US Administration for the UK to benefit from the US Visa Waiver Scheme. [125625]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The United Kingdom is already one of 27 countries whose nationals benefit from the US Visa Waiver Programme when travelling to the US on a full British passport for a visit of less than 90 days. Officials are in discussions with their US counterparts to ensure that the maximum number of UK nationals will continue to benefit from the programme following the introduction of tighter US entry requirements over the next couple of years.

Western Sahara

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the dissolution of the Sahara Section of the Forum for Truth and Justice as a result of a judgment by the Laayoune Court of First Instance; and how many members of the Sahara Section of the Forum for Truth and Justice are in prison. [123462]

Mr. Rammell: Officials are in contact with a number of different organisations in Morocco and in Western Sahara, including the Forum for Truth and Justice. We were aware that the court in Laayoune had recently formally dissolved the Forum's section in Western Sahara. However, the Forum's section in Western Sahara had been inoperative and effectively without a membership for over a year.

Some former members of the Forum continue to monitor the situation in Western Sahara and to undertake case work.

As the British Government would never have had access to the Forum's membership record and effectively the Western Sahara section of the Forum no longer exists we are therefore unable to comment on the number of former members of the Forum, their current locations or activities. We are aware of specific cases involving individuals previously associated with the dissolved section, for example, Ali Salem Tamek whose case officials have raised with the Moroccan authorities.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Pre-legislative Scrutiny

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee when hon. Members will be able to view pre-legislative scrutiny proceedings on-line in their offices; and if he will make a statement. [125001]

Michael Fabricant: Following a successful pilot project, a webcasting service will be established on a permanent basis later this year and will be accessed through the www.parliamentlive.tv website. Links will be provided from the webcasts to details of witnesses and other background material. The service will provide coverage of both Chambers, sittings in Westminster Hall, and some Select and Standing Committees. Audio and video coverage will be available for any committees that are televised. Audio-only coverage will be provided for most other committees. Therefore, if a committee chooses to carry out pre-legislative scrutiny, or if a special committee is appointed for that purpose, it is likely that its proceedings will be webcast either in audio-only or both in audio and video.

Any material webcast will be available on demand from an archive that will hold about 14 days' worth of material. There are plans to make the webcasting service available to all users of the parliamentary network, but this is dependent on an upgrade to the network that is planned for this summer, which will provide greater transmission capacity.

SCOTLAND

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the target is for efficiency savings in 2003–04 expressed *(a)* in money terms and *(b)* as a percentage of the Department's expenditure limit. [114118]

Mrs. McGuire: The Department does not set separate energy efficiency targets, but seeks to operate within the Government's environment and climate change commitments.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement, in relation to his Department and each Agency and non-departmental public body for which his Department is responsible, on *(a)* the amount of energy consumed, *(b)* spending on (i) energy and (ii) energy efficiency measures, *(c)* the amount saved through energy efficiency measures and *(d)* energy policy in each of the last five years. [108868]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office was established on 1 July 1999.

Information in the form requested is not available and can be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Scotland Office does not set separate energy efficiency targets, but it seeks to operate within the Government's environment and climate change commitments.

Hepatitis C (Compensation)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Scottish Health Minister to discuss compensation for hepatitis C sufferers in Scotland. [125646]

Mrs. McGuire: My right hon. Friend and I have frequent discussions with Scottish Executive Ministers on a wide range of issues.

Pay Audits

Angela Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made on completing a pay audit in his Department and its non-departmental public bodies to measure any disadvantage in terms of remuneration for *(a)* women, *(b)* ethnic minorities and *(c)* people with disabilities; and if he will publish the results of such an audit. [117431]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scottish Executive completed an equal pay review, that included staff of the Scotland Office, at the end of April 2003. The initial review considered gender. Race and disability will be considered at a later stage, programmed for completion by the end of April 2004.

A summary of the main findings of the review and what measures will be taken to ensure the pay system is free from bias will be issued to staff shortly.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff in the Department have been on long-term sick leave in each of the last two years. [115859]

Mrs. McGuire: One.

Sponsorship

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which of his Department's projects have received sponsorship in the last financial year; who the sponsor was in each case; what the nature of each project was; what time-period was covered by each project; what the total cost of each project was; how much money was involved in each sponsorship deal; and if he will make a statement. [112394]

Mrs. McGuire: None.

Supreme Court

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to meet *(a)* Scottish Law Lords, *(b)* the judiciary in Scotland, *(c)* the Law Society of Scotland and *(d)* the Faculty of Advocates to discuss the proposals for a Supreme Court. [122718]

Mr. Darling: The Government will fully consult these bodies and other interests in Scotland on their proposals for a Supreme Court. My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs has already had helpful and constructive meetings with the Lord Advocate to discuss the interests of the Scottish Executive and with the two Scottish Law Lords.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drug Testing and Treatment Orders

13. **Mr. Salter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to improve joint working between the police, the criminal justice system and the NHS on the implementation of Drug Testing and Treatment Orders. [125066]

Caroline Flint: The successful delivery of the Drug Treatment and Testing Order (DTTO) involves the Probation Service, treatment providers, the courts and the police, working effectively in partnership together.

In April 2002, over 97 per cent. of all Drug Advisory Teams (DATs) had a joint commissioning group in place, ensuring that best practice is followed in developing and providing appropriate treatment.

An increase of nearly 10 per cent. on the previous year. Last year 6,140 DTTOs were made, exceeding the Government's target of 6,000 Orders demonstrating that current partnership arrangements are working.

Metropolitan Police

14. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received about the pay and conditions of the Metropolitan police. [125067]

Ms Blears: We have received representations from hon. Members, members of the public and others about the pay and conditions of the Metropolitan police. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary meets regularly with the Commissioner and the Chairman of the Metropolitan Police Authority, at which a range of issues are discussed, including pay and conditions.

Asylum Seekers

15. **Mrs. Ann Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the two-year probationary period to qualify for indefinite leave to remain will come into force. [125068]

Beverley Hughes: The two-year probationary period on marriage was introduced as one of a number of changes made to the Immigration Rules on 1 April 2003.

The changes were part of a package of measures to tackle the growing menace of fraudulent or abusive marriages to circumvent immigration control. Other changes were:

introducing a 'no switching' into marriage provision after entry to the United Kingdom for those coming for a short period of six months or less;

removing the probationary period where a marriage or relationship has existed for more than four years and the couple have been living abroad;

preventing someone from acting as a sponsor in a marriage or fiancé application until they are 18 years of age; and

preventing fiancé*(e)*s under the age of 16 from applying for leave to enter; and removing the 'legally unable to marry requirement' for those seeking to enter or remain as an unmarried partner.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants for asylum were granted permission to work in 2002. [123775]

Beverley Hughes: I am afraid that the information is not held centrally and could be obtained only by examination of individual case files. The employment concession for asylum seekers was abolished on 23 July 2002. Prior to its abolition asylum seekers could seek permission to work if their application for asylum remained outstanding for longer than six months without a decision being made on it.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been refused support by the National Asylum Support Service under sections 55 or 57 of the Nationality Asylum and Immigration Act 2002 *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each month since January. [124915]

Beverley Hughes: The information is not available in the form requested.

Section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 came into force on 8 January 2003, restricting the availability of National Asylum Support Service (NASS) support to those asylum seekers who make an asylum application as

soon as reasonably practical.

Of the total (4,365) cases referred to NASS for a Section 55 decision in the first quarter of 2003:

2,850 were refused NASS support on the grounds that their claims were not made as soon as reasonably practicable.

325 were granted MASS support on the grounds that they were made as soon as reasonably practical.

685 were exempted from consideration under Section 55 on the grounds of being a family application.

505 were exempted from consideration under Section 55 to avoid a breach of ECHR rights.

Following the decisions of the High Court and Court of Appeal, a number of decisions made early in the quarter are now being reviewed to ensure compliance with the current decision making process.

Information on Section 57 cases is not available.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of asylum seekers living below poverty levels. [125054]

Beverley Hughes: We are committed to meeting our international obligations with regard to asylum seekers. This includes providing support to eligible asylum seekers and their dependants who would otherwise be destitute. Levels of support are approved by Parliament.

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what conditions an asylum seeker might continue to receive benefits after his or her case has been refused; which benefits are available; and how many such cases arose in each of the last five years. [125340]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* For single asylum seekers and childless couples the legislation allows for support to be provided to asylum seekers until a final decision is made on their claim and, in the case of unsuccessful applicants, for 21 days after the receipt of the final decision on the claim. In the case of families including children under the age of 18, support is provided unless and until the family fails to comply with removal directions or until the youngest child reaches 18.

In the majority of cases there is nothing to prevent the failed asylum seeker from leaving the country once their asylum claim has been finally determined. Letters sent at this stage to failed asylum seekers provide details of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), who will assist the person to make a voluntary return, and also the Immigration Service who will arrange for them to return to their home country.

Failed asylum seekers may be provided with accommodation under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (the 1999 Act). As a matter of policy accommodation is only provided to those unable to leave immediately through no fault of their own e.g. because they are suffering from a temporary physical incapacity or need a travel document to enable them to go. Accommodation provided is full board and will usually be outside London. The legislation does not allow for payment of cash support.

Section 4 of the 1999 Act came into force on 11 November 1999. There are no published statistics on the number of failed asylum seekers who have been provided with accommodation under section 4. This information could only be obtained by examination of individual case records.

22. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support he is giving to asylum seekers in Glasgow. [125076]

Beverley Hughes: The support available to asylum seekers is consistent across the United Kingdom. Eligible asylum seekers and their dependants may be provided with support if they would otherwise be destitute. The provision of support may be subject to conditions. Generally speaking, support is provided until a final decision is made on the claim, but can be terminated early if the asylum seeker fails to comply with the conditions on which support is offered.

Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act

16. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the operation of section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. [125070]

Beverley Hughes: Section 55, which came into operation on 8 January 2003, is one of a package of new measures to move towards a more streamlined and cohesive asylum system. Statistics on the operation of section 55 up to 31 March 2003 were published at the end of May 2003, and we are continuing to monitor the impact closely.

Child Protection

17. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made with promoting *(a)* Child Rescue Alert and *(b)* the Safety House project as national child protection schemes. [125071]

Paul Goggins: A Child Rescue Alert scheme completed its pilot in Sussex at the end of May 2003. Its purpose is to find children who have been abducted. The Homicide Working Group of the Association of Chief Police Officers has recommended that the scheme be implemented under nationally agreed standards.Sussex police are currently waiting for the British Safety House Association to provide more details about the Safety House project, before they give further consideration for this development.

20. **Dr. Desmond Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will introduce new laws to combat the trafficking and sexual exploitation of children within the UK; and if he will make a statement. [125074]

Beverley Hughes: The Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act introduced a new criminal offence of trafficking for control over prostitution with a maximum penalty of 14 years.

The new Sexual Offences Bill also introduces a new offence of commercial sexual exploitation of a child, which will protect children up to 18, covering a range of offences, including buying the sexual services of a child, and causing, facilitating or controlling the commercial sexual exploitation of a child in prostitution or pornography.

Prisons

18. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in dealing with prison overcrowding. [125072]

Paul Goggins: Where imprisonment is the most appropriate punishment, it should be used. An additional 4,500 prison places will be provided over the next three years. Other reforms include the use of Home

Detention Curfew; this will help create a more appropriate balance between the use of custody and community supervision.

Passports

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to reduce passport fraud. [125073]

Beverley Hughes: As indicated in its 2003–08 Corporate and Business Plan, the UK Passport Service is taking forward a range of initiatives to reduce passport fraud through improved fraud detection and prevention. These include:

establishing from December this year a new more comprehensive database for the recording and dissemination of lost, stolen and recovered passport information;

exploring the benefits of using private sector and other Government databases in establishing identity;

introducing secure delivery for the despatch of all passports;

increasing the professionalism of its fraud investigation capability through the creation of fraud and intelligence units in each of its offices, and strengthening training and support for these units;

developing its IT systems to undertake more automatic checks, to better link passport records to an individual, and to identify passport fraud;

investigating the use of biometrics to improve the security of the passport book;

changing the law to make passport fraud offences arrestable, and by creating a new offence relating to being in possession or control of false identity documents, without reasonable cause; and

actively working with law enforcement agencies to apprehend, disrupt and dismantle the activities of those involved in passport fraud.

These initiatives build on the successful implementation of a number of anti-fraud measures, including the prevention of fraudulent applications using the identity of dead children, and strengthening of the counter-signatory requirement for passport applications.

Illegal Immigration (France)

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he has agreed with the French Government to ensure that illegal immigration from the Calais area is not displaced to other routes. [125075]

Beverley Hughes: We have agreed with the French to establish juxtaposed controls at Dunkirk and Boulogne as well as Calais. This will help counter immediate displacement from the Calais area by those seeking to use documents to board ferries. In addition those hiding in freight traffic bound for the United Kingdom are being targeted by the use of UK personnel detection technology loaned to French ports. Calais already has the capability to screen 100 per cent. of freight and screening will be introduced at Dunkirk and Cherbourg.

We continue to meet regularly with the French to discuss how these projects and others relating to increased cross channel border security can best be taken forward. We are also in the process of providing new detection technology to Belgian ports.

Crime Fighting Fund

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received on the effectiveness of the Crime Fighting Fund. [125077]

Ms Blears: None. The Crime Fighting Fund has proved extremely effective in helping to deliver record numbers of police officers. By September 2002 the police service had 131,548 officers in England and Wales.

Anti-Drugs Projects

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the Answer to the honourable Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) of 30 June, Official Report, column 11W, on drugs, if he will list the anti-drugs projects funded from recovered assets, and the amount of money awarded in each case. [124958]

Caroline Flint: In 2002–03 16 anti-drugs projects were awarded funding for 1–3 years from recovered assets at a total cost of £6.5 million. The projects were:

Rehabilitation/Treatment

South Buckinghamshire Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (Slough)—"Criminal Justice Treatment Project"—to set up a drug treatment clinic with a doctor, nurse and counsellor—£220,000

Community Focus (Hull)—"User Involvement Project—to involve drug misusers in identifying and reviewing service provision—£99,400

West Glamorgan Council on Alcohol and Drugs Abuse (Swansea)—"Community Outreach Drug Prevention Initiative"—to provide equipment and advice to heroin addicts and get new people into treatment—£136,718

No Limits (Southampton)—"Young People's Substance Misuse Project"—to provide advice and counselling on drugs issues—£219,472

Brigend County Borough Council—"Brigend Rapid Access Points"—to offer a rapid appointment for assessment and access to treatment for drugs misusers—£462,500

Gwellheans Recovery (Cornwall)—"Caseworker"—to focus on relapse prevention and positive re-integration back into the community—£66,671

North East Council on Addictions (Newcastle)—"The Integrated Treatment/Outreach Programme"—to provide a range of services to prolific substance misusers—£189,612

Reading Drugs Action Team—"Oxford Road Drugs and Street crime Initiative"—Full-time worker to provide advice and support to homeless drugs misusers—£155,000

Diversionary Activities for Young People

Southern Focus Trust (Portsmouth)—"Havant Young People's Access"—a drop-in facility to divert young people from drugs and crime—£276,659

Corby Borough Council—"Project Diversion"—working with disengaged or at risk young people £37,000

Torfaen County Borough Council (Pontypool)—"Musical Youth"—to engage young people through the medium of music—£82,627

Pro-active Drugs related Projects

Lancashire Constabulary—"Drugsline"—Confidential telephone line for the public to contact the police with drug related information—£47,685

Drugscope (London)—"Drug Education for Hard to reach Parents"—to provide information and education about drugs issues—£81,334

Surrey Drug Action Team—"Confidential no-fault Inquiries into Drug Deaths in Surrey"—£10,000

Clouds (Wiltshire)—"Interventions towards the Significant Other"—to provide support for carers of substance misusers—£253,699

Merseyside Police —"Middle Market Drugs Investigation"—to disrupt Class A drug trafficking—£4,236,379

Asylum Applications

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many decisions were made on asylum applications in each year from 1997–2002; and what percentage were granted asylum, including those granted on appeal; [125338]

(2) how many applicants for asylum were granted exceptional leave to remain in each year from 1997–2002; and what percentage this was of the total number of applications. [125339]

Beverley Hughes: Following changes to policy in relation to granting of exceptional leave to remain (ELR) in the second half of 2002, the proportion granted ELR fell in Q3 2002 and in Q4 2002.

The available information is provided in the tables. This shows that the initial decision figures for any given year do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same year. Similarly, appeal outcomes for any given year do not necessarily relate to initial decisions in the same year.

It is estimated that (up to and including appeals at the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) 19 per cent. of applications made in 2000 and in 2001 resulted in grants of asylum. The corresponding figures for grants of ELR for applications made in 2000 and in 2001 were 14 per cent. and 23 per cent. respectively.

Precise information on the number of appeals that result in a grant of asylum or ELR could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case records.

Table 1: Initial asylum decisions in the United Kingdom1, 2, 1997 to 2002

Number of principal applicants

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001[3]	2002[3]
Total initial decisions[4]	36,045	31,570	33,720	109,205	119,015	82,715
Cases considered under normal procedures5						
Total	36,045	31,570	21,305	97,545	119,015	82,715
Granted asylum	3,985	5,345	7,815	10,375	11,180	8,100
Granted asylum (percentage)	11	17	37	11	9	10
Granted ELR	3,115	3,910	2,465	11,495	19,845	19,965
Granted ELR (percentage)	9	12	12	12	17	24
Refused	28,945	22,315	11,925	75,680	87,990	54,650
Refused (Percentage)	80	71	52	78	74	66
Backlog clearance exercise6						
Total	—	—	12,415	11,660	—	—
Granted asylum or ELR under backlog criteria	—	—	11,140	10,325	—	—
Granted asylum or ELR under backlog criteria (percentage)	—	—	90	89	—	—
Refused under backlog criteria[7]	—	—	1,275	1,3365	—	—
Refused under backlog criteria[7] (percentage)	—	—	10	11	—	—

[1] Figures (other than percentages) rounded to the nearest five.
[2] Decision figures do not necessarily relate to applications received in the same period.
[3] Figures for 2001 and 2002 are provisional and subject to change.
[4] Information is of initial decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.
[5] Cases considered under normal procedures may include some cases decided under the backlog criteria.
[6] Cases decided under measures aimed at reducing the pre 1996 asylum application backlog.
[7] Includes some cases where the application has been refused on substantive grounds.

Table 2: Outcome of asylum appeals determined by adjudicators of the Immigration Appellate Authority, 1997–2002[1, 2]

Number of principal appellants

	Total determined	Allowed (percentage)	Dismissed (percentage)	Withdrawn (percentage)
1997	21,090	6	86	8
1998	25,320	9	84	7
1999	19,460	27	57	16
2000	19,395	17	80	2
2001[3]	43,415	19	79	2
2002[3]	64,405	22	76	2

[1] Figures (other than percentages) rounded to the nearest five.
[2] Appeals figures do not necessarily relate to initial decisions made in the same period.
[3] Figures for 2002 are provisional and subject to change.

Domestic Violence

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on tackling domestic violence. [125069]

Mr. Blunkett: Domestic violence is a serious and appalling crime. It represents around a quarter of violent crime. Every week, two women die as a result of such violence.

On 18 June we published "Safety and Justice", a consultation paper outlining proposals to help prevent and tackle the consequences of domestic violence. We want to prevent domestic violence occurring in the first place and to intervene early where it does occur. We want to protect victims and bring offenders to justice, and we want to support victims and their children in re-building their lives.

We want this consultation to be as wide as possible because it is important that we get it right.

Human Trafficking

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of human trafficking for sexual purposes, have been discovered in each of the last three years; from which countries the persons arrived; and how many successful prosecutions have resulted. [124845]

Beverley Hughes: There is currently no accurate, reliable data in existence within the United Kingdom or the European Union. A Home Office research study 'Stopping Traffic' (Police Research Series 125, published in 2000) indicated that there was intelligence to suggest that some women and children are trafficked into the UK for the purposes of sexual exploitation. This was estimated at between 140 and 1,400 per year but it was impossible to make a more accurate assessment of numbers. The report concluded that there was no evidence to suggest that this was on a large scale compared with other European countries.

The Nationality, Asylum and Immigration Act 2002 created a new offence of trafficking for the purpose of controlling someone through prostitution, the relevant sections of which came into force on 10 February 2003. Given that the powers came into effect very recently there is not any information yet held centrally about numbers of victims of this crime. Forming an accurate estimate of the levels of trafficking in people is problematic given the reluctance of the victims of trafficking to report to the police.

The current pilot project for victims of trafficking will provide us with a clearer idea on scale of trafficking problem and enable better assessment to be made of the needs of victims.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedure is followed upon the discovery of individuals trafficked into the UK for sexual purposes; what factors underlie decisions to return them to their home country; and if he will make a statement. [124846]

Beverley Hughes: The White Paper "Secure Borders Safe Haven", published last year, set out a comprehensive approach for supporting the victims of trafficking. It included a commitment to make arrangements for victim protection and support.

In March this year we established a pilot scheme, working with Eaves Housing, a voluntary sector organisation, to provide support and assistance to victims of trafficking to enable them to make an informed decision about co-operating with the authorities. The pilot scheme will initially run on a trial basis for a period of six months so that we can evaluate its impact.

Under the terms of the scheme victims are referred to Eaves housing by the police, via a voluntary organisation or self-referred. There is an assessment made of their needs and they get information about the consequences of co-operating with a prosecution. Their immigration status is considered, and it is recognised that if they co-operate with the authorities then it may be appropriate to allow them to remain in the United Kingdom. This assessment is made on a case by case basis. If they decide to return home, arrangements are made through the International Organisation for Migration, which has a well established voluntary assisted return programme, to assist the woman to reintegrate back into her home society.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has commissioned into the extent of the trafficking of individuals for sexual purposes into the UK; and what discussions he has had with European colleagues on the issue. [124847]

Beverley Hughes: Forming an accurate estimate of the levels of trafficking in people is problematic given the reluctance of the victims of trafficking to report to the police. There is currently no accurate, reliable data in existence within the United Kingdom or the European Union. A Home Office research study 'Stopping Traffic' (Police Research Series 125, published in 2000) indicated that there was intelligence to suggest that some women and children are trafficked into the UK for the purposes of sexual exploitation. This was estimated at between 140 and 1,400 per year but it was impossible to make a more accurate assessment of numbers. The report concluded that there was no evidence to suggest that this was on a large scale compared with other European countries.

The Government have announced their intention to tackle the heinous crime of trafficking through a four-pronged approach set out in the White Paper 'Secure Borders Safe Haven' published last year. This approach encompasses legislation, enforcement, victim support and international co-operation. In the context of this last point, the UK has been working hard to push trafficking up the international agenda. We were at the forefront of work to draft the United Nations trafficking protocol and subsequent EU framework decision on trafficking. We have been closely involved in Europol's work to counter trafficking including establishing a joint intelligence sharing team with Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands on Bulgarian trafficking gangs. The UK also hosted the first EU prosecutors conference on trafficking last year and are closely involved in follow up work. We are also actively shaping EU consideration of

next steps on trafficking through the formation of a new experts group on trafficking that the UK is helping to steer towards tangible action to tackle this form of organised crime.

Immigration Accommodation Centres

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the criteria were upon which sites selected for consideration as possible locations for accommodation centres for immigrants seeking political asylum were rejected. [124082]

Beverley Hughes: All prospective sites for accommodation centres are evaluated against a set of criteria including size, configuration, location, technical characteristics and planning considerations. A large number of sites have been rejected following evaluation against these criteria. A smaller number of sites were included on the shortlist, having met these criteria, but were subsequently rejected for site-specific reasons.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the criteria were upon which the Daedalus site at Lee-on-the-Solent was selected for consideration as a location for a possible accommodation centre for young male immigrants seeking political asylum. [124083]

Beverley Hughes: The site at HMS Daedalus was selected for further assessment because it met both the general criteria for site selection and the requirements of the alternative model. Our detailed assessment of the site continues.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the expected costs of creating accommodation centres for immigrants seeking political asylum, distinguishing between *(a)* capital costs of construction and *(b)* annual total running costs. [124084]

Beverley Hughes: We are in the process of running a competitive tender for the delivery of accommodation centres. Information about costs is commercially confidential.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact on local facilities at Lee-on-the-Solent resulting from the possible introduction of young male immigrants at an accommodation centre. [124085]

Beverley Hughes: We are talking to local authorities and service providers in the area as part of our assessment of the site. Our aim is to minimise the impact on local services by providing as many as possible of the necessary services on-site.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what basis the Department made the statement that the introduction of an accommodation centre for immigrants in a locality would have no impact on house prices. [124086]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office position is that there are many factors that may impact on property prices, both short and long term. We do not accept that the presence of an accommodation centre in a locality would necessarily depress house prices.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces Pensions

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from members of the armed forces who believe that they have been encouraged to leave the Service before they have completed enough years to qualify for a pension; and what action he will take to investigate the complaints. [125377]

Mr. Caplin: Central records of applications for Redress of Complaint have been maintained only since 1997. Since then there have been two applications relating to the manning control policy, which were resolved before submission to the Army Board. In these cases, manning control action was terminated and the individuals concerned continue to serve on their original engagement.

The Manning Control Points have never been used as a way of avoiding pension commitments.

Iraq

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements have been made in respect of partners and orphans of Service men and women killed in action in Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [125642]

Mr. Caplin: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer which my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence gave on 1 May 2003, *Official Report*, columns 452–53W to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird).

MOD Police (School Anti-drugs Projects)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Ministry of Defence Police's support for DARE anti-drug projects in schools. [124789]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence Police continue to provide support for the Drugs Awareness Resistance Education projects at schools attended by the dependants of Service personnel and at some locations utilised by United States visiting forces.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the hon. Member for Fareham will receive an answer to questions 117883 and 117884, tabled for answer on 5 June 2003 and questions 118799, 118800, 118801 and 118802, tabled on 9 June 2003. [125773]

Mr. Caplin: The information requested is not held centrally and needs to be collated from a number of sources. This is still being worked on.

I expect to reply to the hon. Member before the summer recess.

Pay 2000 Computer System

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the effectiveness and performance of the PAY 2000 computer system. [118284]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 12 June 2003]:* The Pay 2000 computer system has generally performed well for both the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. Some programming problems have been identified affecting some Army personnel, which are being addressed with a package of work entitled "Pay 2000 Follow on Work". In the meantime, Regimental Administrative Officers at all army units have the facility to arrange manual payment in any cases where problems are found.

Queen's Birthday Flypast

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what height RAF aircraft flew over the coast of Suffolk on 10 June 2003 in practising for the Queen's Birthday flypast; and at what distance they flew from the Sizewell nuclear power station. [125167]

Mr. Caplin: The aircraft flew between 2,300 and 3,000 feet above mean sea level. It is not possible to determine the precise distance that aircraft flew from the Sizewell nuclear power station but I am able to confirm that no aircraft breached the restricted area around the power station, which is a zone extending to a height of 2,000 feet high by a radius of two nautical miles

Royal Irish Regiment

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the delay experienced by members of the home battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment in receiving their annual bounty; and when the annual bounty will be paid. [116964]

Mr. Caplin: Some part-time members of the Royal Irish Regiment have experienced a delay in receiving their annual bounty for the training year 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003. In some instances this was due to a computer programming error that has now been rectified.

Out of a total strength of some 1,300 part-time personnel, only a handful of bounties remain unpaid. For those that remain outstanding, payment has, in some instances, been delayed due to the soldiers training year being extended, or as a consequence of processing delays due to soldiers leaving the Regiment.

Service Accommodation (Colchester)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether the terms of the sale to Annington Homes of Ministry of Defence dwellings at Colchester Garrison provide for their re-purchase if required by his Department; [124933]

(2) if he will re-purchase the remaining stock of former Ministry of Defence dwellings at Colchester Garrison, occupied by military personnel, which were sold to Annington Homes. [124931]

Mr. Caplin: The 1996 sale to Annington Homes Ltd. of Service families accommodation in England and Wales was on the basis of a 999 year lease. The Ministry of Defence immediately leased back some 55,000 houses, initially for 200 years.

There is no provision in the sale agreement for MOD to re-purchase any of the properties subject to these arrangements.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Arson

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what percentage of all fires were started deliberately in each year since 1997. [125532]

Phil Hope: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Malicious primary fires as a proportion of all primary fires, United Kingdom, 1997–2001

	All primary fires	*Malicious*	
		Percentage	*Number*
1997	200,564	41	82,613
1998	199,928	43	86,208
1999	218,404	47	103,006
2000	219,663	51	111,174
2001	228,229	54	123,184

Notes:
1. Malicious fires are those where deliberate ignition is proved or suspected.
2. Primary fires are those which cause damage to property or involve casualties.
3. Data for 2001 are provisional and the most recent year for which data are available.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of fires in the construction industry were attributed to arson in each year since 1997. [125742]

Phil Hope: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Malicious primary fires as a proportion of all primary fires on construction industry premises, United Kingdom, 1997–2001

	All primary fires	*Malicious*	
		Percentage	*Number*
1997	459	57	261
1998	393	64	253
1999	386	57	222
2000	488	70	341
2001	372	73	270

Notes:
1. Malicious fires are those where deliberate ignition is proved or suspected.
2. Primary fires are those which cause damage to property or involve casualties.
3. Data for 2001 are provisional and the most recent year for which data are available.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much arson has cost retailers in each year since 1997. [125764]

Phil Hope: Information is available only for total commercial fires which includes fires in retail and non-retail premises. Information is available only for 1999 and 2000; that for 2001 will be published in due course.

In England and Wales, the estimated cost of arson to the commercial sector, as measured by damage to property and loss of business, was £220 million in 1999 and £190 million in 2000.

Council Tax (South-West)

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much council tax was collected in each of the last three years in the south-west of England. [124675]

Phil Hope: Tabled are the figures showing how much council tax was collected in each of the last three financial years in the south-west of England.

Total receipts of council tax

	£ billion South-west
2000–01	1.312
2001–02	1.406
2002–03	1.576

Ethical Procurement

Linda Perham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance he has given to local authorities on ethical procurement. [120158]

Keith Hill: Local authorities are independent and autonomous and responsible within the law for making their own decisions on procurement matters. In doing so, they will no doubt consider the case for ethical procurement on its merits, consistent with the EU Procurement Directives, domestic law including the duty of best value. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister set out views on the use of social clauses in contracting in Annex C of Circular 03/2003, "Local Government Act 1999: Part 1—Best Value and Performance Improvement".

Fire Service

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to announce regulations to replace the current Fire Service *(a)* appointment and promotion regulations and *(b)* discipline regulations; and if he will make a statement. [125430]

Mr. Raynsford: The White Paper, "Our Fire and Rescue Service", presented to Parliament by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 30 June 2003, announced that the Fire Services (Appointments and Promotion Regulations) 1978 would be amended to allow multi-level entry to the fire and rescue service and to support development and promotion opportunities for all fire and rescue service staff through the implementation of the Integrated Personal Development System. It also announced that the Fire Services (Discipline) Regulations 1985 would be repealed and replaced with framework regulations based on the most up to date ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) best practice guidance.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister expects to be able to announce the changes to be made to the appointments and promotion regulations by the end of October this year. The final content and promulgation of the regulations will, of course, be subject to parliamentary approval. The replacement of the discipline regulations is expected to be subject to the same timetable.

Fires

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average cost of a domestic fire was in each year since 1997. [125203]

Phil Hope: Information on the cost of a domestic fire is not available before 1999. The estimated average cost of a domestic fire in 1999 was £21,500 and in 2000 it was £24,700. Some of the difference between these figures is due to changes in the way that costs are calculated: using the 1999 methodology, the estimated cost of a domestic fire in 2000 is £23,800.
2000 is the last year for which figures are available; those for 2001 will be published in due course.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people have died as a result of malicious car fires in each year since 1997. [125204]

Phil Hope: The information requested is tabled. 2001 is the most recent year for which data are available.

Fatalities from malicious car fires, United Kingdom, 1997–2001

	Number
1997	20
1998	19
1999	19
2000	21
2001[1]	12

[1] Figures for 2001 are provisional.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what percentage of accidental car fires were caused by an electrical fault in the last year for which figures are available. [125206]

Phil Hope: In 2001, of 18,135 accidental car fires in the United Kingdom, 47 per cent. (8,494 fires) were caused by an electrical fault, related either to the wiring on the car or its batteries (7,540 fires) or due to the ignition system (954 fires).

Funding Schemes

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the *(a)* business and commercial property gap funding scheme, *(b)* housing gap funding scheme, *(c)* heritage approval scheme and *(d)* land remediation scheme were finalised; when he expects guidance to prospective applicants to be published in respect of each of the above schemes. [125347]

Keith Hill: The UK Government notified the European Commission of their proposals to use public sector funds to assist regeneration in order to comply with the state aid rules. The notifications were approved on the following dates:

(a) business and commercial property gap funding—24 May 2002;

(b) housing gap funding—8 July 2002;

(c) heritage aid—13 May 2002; and

(d) land remediation ('dereliction aid')—11 June 2003.

It is for the regeneration bodies; English Partnerships, Regional Development Agencies (including the London Development Agency) and local authorities to decide whether and for what purpose they use the approvals in their areas. Except in the case of the housing approval,

where English Partnerships has developed a standard appraisal process, they are responsible for any application forms and guidelines to developers.

Housing

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the Government took water requirements into account when proposing their new house-building programme. [125509]

Phil Hope: Discussions were held with water companies by the consultants who undertook the growth area studies published last year. More detailed local studies are now under way in most areas, which will help in more detailed assessment of infrastructure requirements. Further discussions with the water industry have taken place since publication of the Sustainable Communities Plan and these will continue involving the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Water UK, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the individual water companies concerned, the Environment Agency and OFWAT.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many social houses are being built this year in each local authority; and how many families are on the housing waiting list in each local authority. [124631]

Keith Hill: Estimates of the number of social dwellings (for rent by registered social landlords and local authorities) built are based on local authority P2 housing returns to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and National House Building Council (NHBC) data.

Local authorities in England report the numbers of households on their housing register (excluding tenants awaiting a transfer) as at 1 April in their Annual Housing Investment Programme returns.

The latest available annual data from these two sources are available in the Library of the House.

Housing Gap Funding Scheme

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many grants have been made in respect of the housing gap funding scheme; what their total value is; to whom they have been made, and in respect of what total area of land; and what proportion of the land was previously undeveloped. [125346]

Keith Hill: English Partnerships, in consultation with the Regional Development Agencies (including the London Development Agency), are currently drawing up an appraisal guide for the implementation of the housing gap funding scheme. It is expected that this guidance will be released for final public consultation in due course.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate the total net yield from council tax, after council tax benefit and single person's discounts, for *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland in each year from 1997–98 to 2003–04. [125287]

Phil Hope: Tabled are the figures showing the estimated council tax receipts collected in England in each financial year from 1997/98 to 2002/03. The receipt information is the best estimate of council tax yield collected after council tax benefit and all discounts have been taken into account. The information shows the total amounts collected within each financial year irrespective of the financial year that the receipt relates to.

Total council tax receipts net of benefits and discounts

	£ billion
1997–98	9.5
1998–99	10.5
1999–2000	11.3
2000–01	12.2
2001–02	13.2
2002–03	14.5

Source:
QRC4

Figures for Wales and Scotland are a matter for the Welsh Assembly Government and Scottish Parliament respectively.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Wood: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to introduce an easier and more affordable way for people to appeal against decisions made by the Planning Inspectorate. [124622]

Keith Hill: None.

Regional Assemblies

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 619W, on regional assemblies, if he will list the opinion polls which were included in his calculation; and if he will place copies of the results in the Library. [125792]

Mr. Raynsford: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister considered the findings of 28 opinion polls that provided supporting evidence on the question of the percentage of people in favour of holding a referendum. Information about these polls is laid out in paragraphs 44 to 59 of the "Your Region, Your Say" document that summarises the information, evidence and views that he considered before deciding to direct the Boundary Committee for England to carry out local government reviews in the three northern regions. Copies of "Your Region, Your Say" and the opinion polls were placed in the Libraries of both Houses on 16 June 2003.

Thames Gateway

David Davis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the Cabinet Committee Misc22's report on the funding of the Thames Gateway project will be published. [125350]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is hoping to make an announcement shortly on taking forward the Thames Gateway.

David Davis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much funding each Thames Gateway project will receive as part of the funding announced in the Communities Plan. [125351]

Keith Hill: Earlier this year, as part of the comprehensive programme to take forward the Communities Plan, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced investment of £446 million for the Thames Gateway. Proposals have been brought forward by the three Sub-regional Thames Gateway Partnerships. These are currently being considered.

Warden Schemes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what alternative funding mechanisms are in place to assist local authorities to retain street and neighbourhood warden schemes following the withdrawal of Government funding. [118160]

Yvette Cooper: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is keen that all funded schemes continue. However, Government funding for warden schemes was awarded on a short-term basis, and it was clear from the start that this financial support would only be for a limited period. Additionally, local authorities have requested that we reduce area-based initiatives, in order that they have more flexibility in how they spend their own funds. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister already has examples of local authorities and housing associations that are mainstreaming schemes.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is working closely with all schemes in the development of their future sustainability plans. Events are being held and guidance has been produced for scheme managers. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is promoting the wardens approach, particularly as a key element of neighbourhood management.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Adult Education

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what proportion of *(a)* economically inactive people on (i) incapacity benefit and (ii) other disability benefits and *(b)* lone parents were on income support without a first Level 2 qualification in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [114488]

(2) what the duration of claims by *(a)* economically inactive people on (i) incapacity benefit and (ii) other disability benefits and *(b)* lone parents on income support without a first Level 2 qualification was in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [114489]

Mr. Browne: The information is not available.

However, the Labour Force Survey shows that 69 per cent. of disabled people receiving Incapacity Benefit and 78 per cent. of lone parents receiving Income Support have qualifications below level 2.

This is why Jobcentre Plus training is strongly focused on basic skills and more appropriately targeted training, ensuring that this is linked to the labour market rather than just a qualification. Our evidence suggests that a Level 2 qualification is not, in general, the most significant milestone in terms of employability. There is a much bigger difference in terms of employment rates between those with no qualifications and a qualification of any kind, and particularly between those with or without basic skills, than between Level 2 and lower qualifications.

Benefits Payments

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* child benefit customers, *(b)* veterans agency customers, *(c)* pensions customers and *(d)* Jobcentre Plus customers received their payments by means of a Post Office card account as at 27 June 2003. [125381]

Mr. Pond *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* The question cannot be answered in the format requested. Information available on the number of child benefit, veterans agency, pensions and Jobcentre Plus customers that have received their payments by means of a Post Office card account as at various dates in June 2003 is shown in the following table.

The numbers are expected to grow rapidly in the coming months as 20 week order books begin to expire and customers begin to receive payment direct into their card accounts.

Number of customers paid through card account

Customers	*Number*
Child benefit	508
Veterans agency	109
Pensions	246
Jobcentre Plus	2,856

Disability Benefits

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received from disability organisations concerning the Cumulative Rule for withdrawal of disability benefits for people in hospital. [125425]

Maria Eagle: We have received no recent representations from disability organisations about the rules which treat periods of hospital in-patient treatment separated by no more than 28 days as a single period for the purpose of determining when payments of disability living allowance or attendance allowance can be made. We believe that these rules are fair and reflect that all the disability related needs of severely disabled people entitled to those benefits are met free of charge by the national health service when they are in hospital.

Ductile Iron Gas Mains

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether the medium pressure ductile iron gas mains within 30 metres of buildings owned and recently discovered by Transco was replaced by 30 April 2003. [120476]

Mr. Browne: Transco completed the replacement of the outstanding quantity of medium pressure ductile iron mains within 30 metres of buildings by 30 April 2003 in various locations across Great Britain. Originally Transco calculated the length was 11.382 km. However, further site investigation revealed some pipe was not in fact ductile iron and the total replaced was 10.69 km.

Health and Safety

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the role competition can play in health and safety regulatory functions other than building control; and if he will make a statement. [123218]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 4 July 2003]:* The basic framework set out in the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, places a duty to manage and control risk on those who create it and be responsible for the protection of workers and the public from any consequence of their work activity. Enforcement by health and safety inspectors is an essential element of the basic framework, which has stood the test of time. The possibility of contracting out health and safety inspection was however, considered and rejected in the course of the 1996 quinquennial review.

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 1 July 2003, ref 121171, when he expects to receive the report from the Health and Safety Commission. [123680]

Mr. Browne: We expect to receive the report from the Health and Safety Commission by the end of the year.

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the level of funding was for the Health and Safety Executive in each of the last 10 years. [122516]

Mr. Browne: The following table reflects the funding for the Health and Safety Executive in each year since 1993–94:

Health and Safety Executive funding

£ million

	Cash budget[1]	Resource budget
1994–95	188.4	—
1995–96	186.8	—
1996–97	[2]179.5	—
1997–98	174.1	—
1998–99	175.7	—
1999–2000	180.6	—
2000–01[3]	181.3	—
2001–02[4]	—	199.4
2002–03	—	210.4
2003–04	—	225.5

[1] The funding has been interpreted as the total amount voted by Parliament.
[2] On 1 April 1996 the accounting arrangements changed as the Health and Safely Laboratory was set up as a net running cost regime (separately identifiable for financial reporting purposes).
[3] The budget for 2000–01 was the last under the cash budget system.
[4] The increase in the funding was due to the introduction/ implementation of Resource Accounting and Budgeting in Government Departments. Under RAB, all departments produce budgets and accounts on an accruals basis, which include costs for depreciation, cost of capital and provisions for liabilities. Therefore, Resource Budgets for years from 2001–02 are not directly comparable with previous cash budgets.

Hepatitis C

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he last met the Scottish Health Minister to discuss compensation for the hepatitis C sufferers in Scotland. [125647]

Maria Eagle: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not met the Scottish Health Minister to discuss this issue. However, Ministers are in regular contact with the devolved Administrations over a wide range of issues.

Income Replacement Benefits

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to bring *(a)* disability living allowance, *(b)* attendance allowance and *(c)* carers allowance into line with income replacement benefits for people who stay in hospital. [125429]

Maria Eagle: None. We believe that the current rules are fair. The changes we have made ensure that for most people the benefits they receive for every day living are not touched while they are in hospital. This recognises that hospital in-patients are likely to have on-going costs of maintaining their homes. Disability living allowance and attendance allowance, however, help with the disability-related needs of severely disabled people. These needs are met by the national health service when the recipients are in hospital, and so payment of these benefits stops after 4 weeks. Entitlement to carer's allowance can continue throughout breaks in care for holidays or for hospitalisation of the carer or disabled person. Provided the DUVAA remains in payment, these breaks can total 12 weeks in a period of 26 weeks.

IT Specialists

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of British IT specialists seeking employment in each year since 1999. [120300]

Mr. Browne: It is not possible to estimate the number of IT specialists seeking work in the economy as a whole. Jobcentre Plus does however keep records of the number of IT specialists seeking work through their offices, however this is not broken down by their nationality. The available information is in the table:

Number of IT specialists seeking work

Calendar year	Number seeking work that year
1999	5,600
2000	11,279
2001	22,921
2002	27,601
2003[1]	6,658

[1] Figures are for January to May 2003 inclusive.
Source:
Labour Market System

Minimum Income Guarantee (Scotland)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money was claimed in minimum income guarantee in Scotland in 2002–03, broken down by local authority. [124839]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Local authority	Expenditure (£ million)
Total Scotland Government Office Region	447
Aberdeen City	14
Aberdeenshire	13
Angus	8
Argyll and Bute	9
Clackmannanshire	2
Dumfries and Galloway	13
Dundee City	18
East Ayrshire	12
East Dunbartonshire	6
East Lothian	7
East Renfrewshire	4
Edinburgh, City of	30
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (previously Western Isles)	4
Falkirk	11
Fife	22
Glasgow City	92
Highland	16
Inverclyde	9
Midlothian	4
Moray	5
North Ayrshire	12
North Lanarkshire	31
Orkney Islands	1
Perth and Kinross (previously Perthshire and Kinross)	9
Renfrewshire	16
Scottish Borders, The	7
Shetland Islands	2
South Ayrshire	9
South Lanarkshire	29
Stirling	6
West Dunbartonshire (previously Dumbarton and Clydebank)	11
West Lothian	12

Notes:
1. MIG expenditure relates to program money payable to the individual and does not include the cost to DWP of administering the benefit.
2. The Expenditure for 2002–03 reflects the latest benefit-by-benefit estimate of out turn for the year and not the amounts voted by Parliament.

3. Amounts shown are in £ millions cash terms on a Resource Accounting and Budgeting basis and are consistent with the Budget 2003 forecasts and departmental expenditure tables.
4. Totals may not sum due to rounding.
5. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.
6. Because of relatively small sample sizes at local authority level the figures are subject to a greater margin of error than would be associated with national level expenditure estimates; all results are rounded to the nearest £1 million, but may not be accurate to this level.

New Deal

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many complaints against providers of New Deal placements and training have been made; how many New Deal placement and training providers have had their contract cancelled owing to *(a)* ineffective training and *(b)* poor employment practices; what other action has been taken against providers of ineffective training and poor employment practices; how the training quality of New Deal placements is assessed; and if he will make a statement. [122467]

Mr. Browne: The information requested regarding numbers of complaints against New Deal providers and numbers of contracts cancelled is not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

All New Deal providers are subject to thorough contractual and quality audits. Individual contract reviews are conducted by Jobcentre Plus contract managers and District Programme Quality Management Teams. Reviews assess the administration, delivery, quality and propriety of the provision being delivered against the requirements set out in providers' contracts. In addition, the Adult Learning Inspectorate in England, and Estyn in Wales, play a pivotal role in the quality assurance of New Deal provision, under the provisions of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. All inspection under the requirements of the Act is carried out in accordance with the Common Inspection Framework. The framework focuses on the learner, and on evaluating the effectiveness of education and training in meeting all learners' needs.

New Deal providers who fail to meet their contractual requirements, or who fall below accepted quality levels, are subject to thorough improvement strategies and action plans agreed between them and Jobcentre Plus. Where no improvements have taken place within agreed timescales, action is taken to terminate the contract in accordance with contractual terms and conditions. When re-tendering or extending contracts, such quality issues are considered and, where relevant evidence exists, this is considered as part of the decision to award or extend. Where a serious irregularity or fraud is identified, Jobcentre Plus retains the right to terminate contracts with immediate effect.

New Deal for Young People

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much funding his Department and its predecessors allocated to the full-time education and training option under the New Deal for Young People in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [114472]

Mr. Browne: Information on spend on the New Deal Full Time Education and Training Option is in the table:

New Deal for Young People full-time education and training option spend

£ million

	Spend
1997–98[1]	0
1998–99	19
1999–2000	36
2000–01	34
2001–02	23
2002–03[2]	18

[1] Minimal spend incurred on the Full Time Education and Training Option during January-March 1998 and so is rounded to zero.
[2] Estimated out-turn. Figures will be available when the Jobcentre Plus Annual Report is published later this year.
Source:
Jobcentre Plus

An allocation figure for 2003–04 is not available. The New Deal for Young People programme budget is now allocated to Jobcentre Plus Regions where decisions on how funding is spent on each New Deal Option are based on meeting the local needs of participants.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much has been spent each year on each of the options within the New Deal for Young People. [114551]

Mr. Browne: The information requested is in the table:

New Deal for Young People—Spending on options

£ million

Option	*1997–98*[1]	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*[2]
Full-time Education and Training	0	19	36	34	23	18
Voluntary Sector	0	13	38	39	36	26
Environment Task Force	0	12	42	42	42	27
Employment	0	19	28	18	15	16

[1] NDYP started in January 1998 and, as participation in the New Deal options normally commenced after a four month Gateway period, the spend on the NDYP options was very small and so is rounded to zero.

[2] Estimated out-turn as Jobcentre Plus accounts for 2002–03 are not yet finalised. Figures will be available when the Jobcentre Plus Annual Report is published later this year.

Source:

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of New Deal for Young People participants found work on *(a)* the Gateway and *(b)* the Extended Gateway, in each year since 1997. [121221]

Mr. Browne: In exceptional circumstances, New Deal for Young people (NDYP) participants can have their Gateway period extended. However, these cases are not recorded separately.

The available information is in the table:

New Deal for Young People: Participants leaving Gateway to an unsubsidised job

	Proportion (percentage)
1998	48.5
1999	44.6
2000	44.3
2001	41.8
2002	40.2
2003 (January to March)	37.1

Source:
New Deal Evaluation Database

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of starts on each of the New Deal for Young People options have led to sustained unsubsidised employment. [121222]

Mr. Browne: By the end of March 2003, 427,900 young people had gained work through the New Deal for Young People (NDYP). The information requested is in the table:

New Deal for Young People Options

NDYP option	*Number of starts*	*Numbers moving into sustained unsubsidised employment*	*Proportion (percentage)*
Employment	67,400	30,000	44.5
Education/Training	118,800	33,200	27.9
Voluntary Sector	70,000	20,700	29.6
Environmental Task Force	67,100	19,200	28.6

Note:
Included within the number of starts are 21,800 people who are currently still participating on an NDYP Option.
Source:
New Deal Evaluation Database

Operational Intelligence Units

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether Scotland is classified as a nation or a region for the purposes of the National Model for the Operational Intelligence Units. [124947]

Mr. Pond: The National Model for the Operational Intelligence Units is based on the organisation of Jobcentre Plus which was established in April 2002. Jobcentre Plus is made up of the countries of Scotland and Wales and the nine English regions.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people are employed in the East of Scotland Operational Intelligence Unit; [124948]

(2) how many jobs will be lost as a result of the closure of the East of Scotland Operational Intelligence Unit; [124949]

(3) how many people are employed in the Glasgow Operational Intelligence Unit; [124950]

(4) whom he consulted prior to the announcement of the closure of the East of Scotland Operational Intelligence Unit. [124951]

Mr. Pond: There are currently 21 officers employed in the East of Scotland Operational Intelligence Unit and 25 officers in the Glasgow Operational Intelligence Unit.

By the end of 2003–04 it is planned to transfer the work of the Edinburgh unit to the Glasgow site in order to improve co-ordination of the delivery of Operational Intelligence Unit services across Scotland.

The centralisation of the Operational Intelligence Unit in Glasgow will result in no job losses. The staff currently employed in Edinburgh will remain at this location and be allocated other counter fraud work and the Glasgow Operational Intelligence Unit will eventually employ a total of 49 staff.

The decision to transfer the counter fraud work from Edinburgh to Glasgow did not involve the closure of any Jobcentre Plus office or result in any job losses. Therefore it was felt that this was an internal management matter and so, apart from consultation with local union officials, consultation outside Jobcentre Plus was not appropriate.

Pensioners (Shrewsbury and Atcham)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Shrewsbury and Atcham have been *(a)* sent details of the new pension credit scheme and *(b)* informed of the phasing out of pension books. [125628]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the form requested. The Pension Service began in April 2003 to write to pensioner households to explain pension credit and to invite applications. The order in which households are contacted has been designed to produce a controlled and measured build up of applications, evenly distributed throughout the UK. The households to be contacted before October represent a cross section of the pensioner population, including pensioners of all age groups and likely levels of eligibility for pension credit. By June 2004, all pensioner households will have been contacted. As part of a separate exercise, The Pension Service also began in April to write to pensioners to invite them to convert to direct payment into an account. This exercise will be completed by October 2004.

Pensions

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations his Department has received in relation to charity sector involvement in the new Employers' Task Force on Pensions; and whether the Employers' Task Force on Pensions will be seeking further representations from the charity sector. [120043]

Malcolm Wicks: The Charity Finance Director's Group (CFDG) have written to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to Sir Peter Davis, Chairman of the Employer Task Force on Pensions, regarding charity sector involvement.

Membership of the Employer Task Force was announced in the answer given by my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Baroness Hollis, on 5 June 2003, *Lords Official Report,* column 188–89WA. Within a small Task Force not all sectors could be individually represented. However members have been appointed on their own merit and Lucy Anderson brings experience of the charity sector, from her previous work at SCOPE.

CFDG have also provided a submission to the Task Force. It will be for Sir Peter Davis and the Task Force to consider whether they wish to seek further representations from the charity sector.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* estimated current level of funding of occupational pensions schemes and *(b)* proportion of schemes in deficit is, with the aggregate size of those deficits, is using (i) the present basis for minimum funding requirement and (ii) that which operated in May 1997. [124022]

Malcolm Wicks: Information about scheme funding levels as assessed on the basis of the minimum funding requirement (MFR) is not routinely collected. Estimates prepared by the Government Actuary's Department, based on economic conditions in June 2003, are set out in the table[1].

[1] These estimates are based on MFR data collected from the actuarial profession from consulting actuaries and insurance companies on the MFR funding levels of a sample of just over 1,000 schemes that had an MFR valuation with an effective date between April 1997 and April 2000. The sample may under-represent certain types of schemes, for example smaller schemes. These data have been broadly adjusted to reflect economic conditions in June 2003 using assumptions about the investment policies of the schemes involved: figures for a different date could well give different results depending on movements in market conditions. However, the exact position now on the MFR basis as it operated in 1997 cannot be known exactly, as the financial indicators specified for use in the calculations originally are no longer published in the same form.

	Estimates based on current MFR basis	*Estimates based on MFR basis operating in May 1997*
Level of funding against the MFR taking together all schemes subject to the MFR[1] (Percentage)	106	98
Proportion of schemes below 100 per cent. funded on the basis of the MFR[2] (Percentage)	50	75
Aggregate MFR deficit across all schemes below 100 per cent. funded on the basis of the MFR[3] (£ billion)	30	60

[1] These estimates indicate total scheme assets expressed as a percentage of total scheme MFR liabilities.
[2] Rounded to the nearest 5 per cent.
[3] Rounded to the nearest £5 billion.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what changes have been made to the basis for minimum funding requirement since May 1997; and what effect the changes have had on the demonstrated level of funding of a typical pension scheme. [124023]

Malcolm Wicks: The actuarial basis for the minimum funding requirement (MFR) is kept under review by the Faculty and Institute of Actuaries. They have recommended two substantive changes to the basis since May 1997, and both were implemented. From 15 June 1998 the factor for the equity market value adjustment, which generally applies to the calculation of liabilities for scheme members below pension age, was reduced from 4.25 per cent. to 3.25 per cent. and the gross yield on the FTSE Actuaries All-Share Index was replaced with the net yield on the same index. From 7 March 2002 the factor for the equity market value adjustment was further reduced, from 3.25 per cent. to 3.00 per cent. The changes were intended to address movements in the strength of the MFR test resulting from changing economic and demographic trends. In addition to these changes there have been a number of minor technical amendments to the actuarial guidance which governs the calculation of a scheme's MFR liabilities.

It is not possible to define a typical pension scheme, but estimates[1] about the effect of these changes on the aggregated MFR funding levels of all schemes subject to the MFR have been prepared by the Government Actuary's Department. These indicate that the change which took effect from 15 June 1998 may have increased aggregate funding levels against the MFR by around 5 per cent. and that the change which took effect in March 2002 may have further increased aggregate funding levels against the MFR by around 3 per cent.

[1] These estimates are based on MFR data collected from the actuarial profession from consulting actuaries and insurance companies on the MFR funding levels of a sample of just over 1,000 schemes that had an MFR valuation with an effective date between April 1997 and April 2000. The sample may under-represent certain types of schemes, for example smaller schemes. These data have been broadly adjusted to reflect economic conditions in June 2003 using assumptions about the investment policies of the schemes involved.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list, for each constituency in Wiltshire *(a)* the numbers of pensioners aged 80 and over in receipt of state pensions and *(b)* the total number in receipt of state pensions; and what percentage of the total number pensioners aged 80 and over represent. [120983]

Malcolm Wicks: Pursuant to my written answer of 30 June 2003, *Official Report,* columns 85–86W.

The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is shown in the table:

State Pension recipients aged 80 and over as at 30 September 2002

	Thousand		
	Total number of State Pension recipients aged 80 and over	*Total number of State Pension recipients*	*Percentage of those over 80 in receipt of State Pension*
North Wiltshire	4.2	17.5	24.0
Salisbury	5.6	20.5	27.3
North Swindon	2.4	12.5	19.2
South Swindon	3.1	15.9	19.7
Westbury	5.3	21.2	24.9
Devizes	4.4	19.5	22.7

Note:
1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred and are expressed in thousands.
2. Numbers are based on 5 per cent. sample, and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.
3. Parliamentary Constituencies are allocated using the relevant Office for National Statistics postcode directory.
Source:
Pensions Strategy Computer System as at 30 September 2002.

Rodenticides

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what part of his Department has special responsibility for *(a)* assessing the impact of rodenticides on non-target wildlife, *(b)* producing guidelines on good practice in the use of rodenticides and *(c)* ensuring that rodenticides are used in accordance with legal requirements. [124635]

Mr. Browne: The Health and Safety Executive has recently taken over responsibility from DEFRA for the registration and assessment of rodenticides under the Control of Pesticides Regulations. Five Government Departments are signatories to these regulations, DWP, DEFRA, DH, Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales. The policy lead for vertebrates and wildlife issues remains with DEFRA. Rodenticides will be among the first chemicals to be reviewed under the EU Biocidal Products Directive next year and controls under this Directive will replace those that currently exist under the Control of Pesticides Regulations. HSE is the Competent Authority for the Biocidal Products Directive in the UK. The evaluation of products includes an assessment of the possible effects to non-target species.

The HSE has produced guidance on the safe use of rodenticides on farms and holdings, and is currently compiling specific guidance for the safe use of rodenticides in urban areas. A copy has been placed in the Library. Information and advice for the user of a rodenticide on how a product should be applied is given on the product label, and is specific for each product.

The enforcement of the Control of Pesticides Regulations is split between the relevant enforcing bodies, which include HSE, Local Authorities and DEFRA. Which authority carries out the enforcement action is dependant on whether the product was used by a member of the public or someone employed to carry out a treatment, where the product was used and whether people, animals or the environment could have been affected by the treatment. The HSE free leaflet 'Reporting Incidents of Exposure to Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines' (INDG14) provides advice to members of the public on which body to contact and is available from HSE Books. A copy has been placed in the Library.

State Pension (Arrears Payment)

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will pay all pensioners in receipt of state pension in arrears; and if he will make a statement. [124237]

Malcolm Wicks: State pension has always been paid in advance. Groups representing pensioners advise that they wish these arrangements to continue, simply because it is financially advantageous to the beneficiary concerned, as the following table illustrates:

Date	*Payment in advance*	*Payment in arrears*
Thursday, 11 September 2003	Man becomes 65 years	
Monday, 15 September 2003	Receives £77.45 full week's payment for the forthcoming week	Receives £44.28 (4/7ths of £77.45) for the period 11 September 2003
Regular weekly payments continue		
Monday, 22 September 2003	Receives full week's SP for the period 22 September 2003 to 28 September 2003	Receives full week's SP for the period 15 September 2003 to 21 September 2003
Wednesday, 24 September 2003	Man dies	
Monday, 29 September 2003	No entitlement	3/7ths of SP for the period 22 September 2003 to 24 September 2003 due to the estate

Tax Credit Claims Forms

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the average time taken to claim forms for the pension credit. [124312]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 84W.

Workstep

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has undertaken of the effectiveness of Workstep as a replacement for the assisted places scheme for people with learning and physical disabilities; and if he will make a statement. [123352]

Maria Eagle: Jobcentre Plus plans to undertake a five year evaluation of Workstep. It will look at the impact of the programme on employment among disabled people, the service processes and outcomes for individual participants and the financial costs and benefits of the programme.

The evaluation will include interviews with customers, providers, disability employment advisers together with longitudinal case studies. Results of the evaluation will be published as they become available.

Jobcentre Plus has published a report: "Results-based Funded Supported Employment: Avoiding Disincentives to Serving People with Greatest Need" (W160 March 2003), a copy of which has been placed in the Library. This paper looks at the various results-based funding models and aims to inform development of Workstep funding.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Autism

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people suffer from autism in Northern Ireland. [123718]

Angela Smith: Information on numbers of individuals diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorders is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Belfast Education and Library Board

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been allocated in each year since 1997 to the *(a)* controlled, *(b)* maintained, *(c)* integrated and *(d)* Irish Language sectors of education in the Belfast Education and Library Board area in each year since 1997. [123802]

Jane Kennedy: Resources are not allocated to specific sectors but rather are targeted to meet the needs of individual schools.

Recurrent Funding

Schools are allocated funding under the appropriate LMS Scheme and the Board also provides services for schools that are not disaggregated by individual sector or school, for example school meals, school transport and the Curriculum, Advisory and Support Services (CASS). I have been advised that recurrent expenditure in each sector for the period requested is as follows:

£ million

	Controlled[1]	Maintained	Grant Maintained Integrated	Irish Medium
1997–98	56.5	59.6	2.9	1.8
1998–99	56.7	61.8	3.8	1.9
1999–2000	62.4	63.3	5.1	2.4
2000–01	67.8	69.7	5.7	2.8
2001–02	69.9	74.9	5.7	3.0
2002–03	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]

[1] Including Controlled Integrated Schools
[2] Figures not yet available

Belfast Royal Hospital for Sick Children

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many scheduled operations were deferred in the last two years at the Belfast Royal Hospital for sick children. [123804]

Angela Smith: A total of 168 operations have been deferred at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children over the past two years. These have been due to a variety of social, medical and resource reasons, including at the request of the patient's family, the patient being unfit for the operation, the patient no longer requiring the procedure and staff shortages.

Buses

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* Ulster buses and *(b)* City buses of the Translink fleet are (i) under two years, (ii) between two and five years, (iii) between five and 10 years and (iv) over 10 years old. [125184]

Mr. Spellar: Translink has advised that the age profile of its bus fleet as at 30 June 2003 was as follows.

	Citybus	Ulsterbus	Total
Under two years	0	59	59
Between two and five years	73	133	206
Between five and 10 years	62	191	253
Over 10 years	121	807	928
Total	256	1,190	1,446

Classroom 2000

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the outcome was of the Classroom 2000 project; and what targets have been set for the project. [123792]

Jane Kennedy: The Classroom 2000 project, now known as "C2k", is still being implemented. The provision of equipment and services to over 900 primary schools was completed by the target date of December 2002, with the exception of six schools in the process of rebuilding or refurbishment. Delivery and installation of the service to 285 post-primary and special schools is due to commence in September 2003 and be completed by March 2004.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the total cost was of hospitality provided by the Northern Ireland Office in each year since 1997. [125310]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Northern Ireland Office provided the following hospitality since 1997:

	£
2002–03	369,505
2001–02	241,760
2000–01	286,442
1999–2000	343,789
1998–99	681,670
1997–98	252,585

Fatal Car Accidents

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures are being taken to

prevent deaths through car accidents on the main road between Belfast and Bangor in North Down. [125810]

Mr. Spellar: I have asked the Chief Executive of Roads Service to write to the hon. Lady in response to this question. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Hospital Admissions

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to make an assessment of how many residents of the Irish Republic require admission to hospitals in Northern Ireland. [124688]

Angela Smith: I have no immediate plans to make such an assessment. However, I would expect information on likely cross-border patient flows to be collected in the future as part of the implementation of Developing Better Services.

Indoor Arenas

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many representations were received during the public consultation on the licensing of indoor arenas; and how many were *(a)* in favour and *(b)* opposed. [125554]

Mr. Spellar: Out of a total of 54 responses to the Consultation Paper, 38 supported the proposals contained in it, eight were opposed and eight did not express a preference.

Irish Language

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to his answer of 11 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 965W, on the Irish language, what costs have been incurred since 1998 as a result of Irish language policy by *(a)* the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, *(b)* the Department of Education and *(c)* other government departments. [122343]

Angela Smith: The costs incurred since 1998 as a result of Irish Language policy by the *(a)* Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, *(b)* Department of Education and *(c)* other Government Departments since 1998 are as follows:

	£
(a) DHSSPS	306,188
(b) DE	47,802
(c) Other Departments	75,445
Total	429,435

Local Councillors

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether a review of attendance allowances for local councillors in Northern Ireland is in progress. [124406]

Angela Smith: Yes. A review of councillors' personal allowances is currently being undertaken by the Department of the Environment. Attendance allowance is one of the factors which will be taken into account as part of that review.

Maternity Hospital, Belfast

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he estimates the business plan for the new regional maternity hospital in Belfast will be completed. [124518]

Angela Smith: On 27 June I wrote to the Chairman of the Royal Group of Hospitals Health and Social Services Trust requesting that he proceed immediately with the preparation of the business case for the new regional maternity hospital in Belfast. It is estimated that the business case will take approximately six months to complete.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he estimates construction of a new regional maternity hospital in Belfast will begin; and when it will become fully operational. [124519]

Angela Smith: Subject to the business case and approval process, it is anticipated that construction work will begin on-site in 2005 and will take approximately five years to complete.

MMR Vaccine

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent research has been conducted on the MMR vaccine. [123719]

Angela Smith: Primary MMR research has not been undertaken in Northern Ireland, mainly due to the small size of our population. However large studies addressing the issues of MMR safety and effectiveness have been carried out in the UK and other European countries. The most recent of these is a Danish study which was published at the end of 2002. This study looked at the effects of MMR in over half a million Danish children. The study concluded that there was no link between MMR and autism or any other neurodevelopment disorders.

DHSSPS receive advice on immunisation policy from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) who keep all national and international research under regular review. The JCVI continues to recommend the use of MMR vaccine for all children.

Further information is available on the websites of the Medical Research Council, www.doh.gov.uk and www.mmrthefacts.nhs.uk.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how the Northern Ireland Housing Executive monitors the community background of contractors to which it awards work. [125312]

Mr. Spellar: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, in line with other public sector bodies, does not monitor the community background of contractors to which it awards work. However, there is a requirement that all contractors sign a Fair Employment Declaration which must be submitted with each tender. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland monitors contractors' compliance with current employment legislation.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many contracts have been awarded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for all types of work in each year since 1997. [125313]

Mr. Spellar: The number of contracts awarded is as follows:

	Number
1997–98	599
1998–99	390
1990–2000	342
2000–01	270
2001–02	257
2002–03	292

Adaptation work (which is not included in the table) is let as individual schemes under 'umbrella' contracts. There are currently 91 'umbrella' contracts ongoing. These are let on a one-year term, renewable for up to five years. This figure would be similar for each year from 1997–98.

In addition, at any given time there are some 750 ongoing response maintenance contracts. These contracts are let for periods of between one and five years and are re-tendered on expiry.

Police Investigation

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he has taken to ensure that Sir John Stevens has sufficient resources to complete his investigation. [124333]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Sir John Stevens reports to the Chief Constable of the PSNI and his investigation has been funded by the PSNI. The resourcing of his ongoing investigation is therefore a matter for the Chief Constable.

Press Offices

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost is of the press offices of each department in Northern Ireland. [123956]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The costs of the NIO press office and the press offices of each of the 11 Departments of the Northern Ireland administration for the financial year 2003 are as follows:

Department	*£*
N10	1,877,494.31
OFMDFM	1,145,463.02
DARD	229,487.58
DCAL	111,480.29
DE	198,343.96
DEL	185,700.00
DETI	187,000.00
DOE	194,000.00
DFP	150,455.00
DHSSPS	291,725.00
DRD	156,000.00
DSD	267,250.00

The figure for OFMDFM includes costs associated with the co-ordination and corporate service functions in support of the Executive Information Service across the 11 Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments. For example all press releases for NI Departments are despatched through OFMDFM.

Royal Group of Hospitals

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the accessing by terrorist organisations of medical records at the Royal Group of Hospitals. [124142]

Mr. Paul Murphy: One individual, who was an employee of the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH), has been charged in relation to intelligence gathering at the RVH. The individuals affected by the intelligence gathering have been informed by the PSNI. The RVH is doing everything possible to assist the police in their investigations.

In addition, the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Angela Smith), has asked the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety to undertake a full and thorough review of patient data security arrangements at all HSS Trusts. A report is expected in the Autumn.

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost has been to the public purse of the Saville Inquiry broken down by *(a)* legal fees, *(b)* accommodation, *(c)* transportation, *(d)* provision of IT equipment and *(e)* hiring of halls. [123998]

Mr. Spellar: Up to end June 2003 the cash spend by the Northern Ireland Office on the Bloody Sunday Inquiry was a total of £89.2 million. Breaking this down in the categories requested gives the following figures:

	£ million
(a) legal fees,	38.194
(b) accommodation,	7.283
(c) transportation,	2.043
(d) provision of IT equipment	12.273
(e) hiring of halls	5.492
(f) other[1]	23.915

[1] Figure includes salary costs of Tribunal members (except Lord Saville) and Inquiry staff, witness expenses, expert witnesses, office services and security, telecommunications and other miscellaneous office expenditure.

Security Services

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what savings have been made since August 1989 as a result of reductions in the strength of security services in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [123663]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Ministry of Defence does not hold information in the form requested for the period of time in question and therefore an answer could not be compiled with any accuracy. Reductions to armed forces levels in Northern Ireland do not necessarily result in a saving to the Defence Budget as these resources are often re-deployed to other commitments.

The expenditure and manning levels for the Police Service of Northern Ireland (formerly the RUC) for the period in question are as follows.

	1989	2002
Budget (£ million)	420.6	654.2
Manning levels		
Regular Officers	8,264	7,041
Full-time Reserve	3,018	2,256

Social Security Fraud

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are employed in combating fraud in social security in Northern Ireland. [125308]

Mr. Spellar: The Social Security Agency has 385 staff who are involved in a number of activities to combat social security fraud, including the:

measurement of the levels of fraud and error.

analysis of the reasons and causes of fraud and error.

reviewing of cases to identify inaccuracy at initial claim stage and within existing claims.

In addition to that, the agency also employs a further 184 staff in benefit security services who are dedicated to the identification, investigation and referral for prosecution of all cases of social security fraud.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been prosecuted for fraud in relation to social welfare and benefit payments in each year since 1997. [125309]

Mr. Spellar: The number of successful prosecutions for social security fraud in each financial year since 1997 is listed in the table.

Financial year	*Successful prosecutions*
1997–98	430
1998–99	448
1999–2000	519
2000–01	623
2001–02	520
2002–03	340

Physiotherapy Vacancies

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many NHS physiotherapy vacancies there are in Northern Ireland. [124691]

Angela Smith: As at 30 September 2002 there were physiotherapy vacancies amounting to a whole-time equivalent of 42.63. Physiotherapy vacancies detailed by trust are given in the following table.

Health and social services (HSS) trust	*Whole-time equivalent*
Sperrin Lakeland HSS Trust	4
Causeway HSS Trust	4
United Hospitals HSS Trust	10
Altnagelvin Group HSS Trust	2.63
Royal Group of Hospitals HSS Trust	2.5
Belfast City Hospital HSS Trust	3.5
Newry and Mourne HSS Trust	1
Craigavon Area Hospital Group HSS Trust	2
Green Park Healthcare HSS Trust	3
South and East Belfast HSS Trust	3
Down Lisburn HSS Trust	7
Homefirst Community HSS Trust	—
Craigavon and Banbridge Community HSS Trust	—
Foyle Community HSS Trust (including Westcare)	—
Armagh and Dungannon HSS Trust	—
Mater Infirmorum Hospital HSS Trust	—
Ulster Community and Hospitals Group HSS Trust	—
North and West Belfast HSS Trust	—
Total	42.63

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his Answer of 20 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 443W, on asbestos, if he will list buildings which have been identified as containing asbestos. [122974]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Within my Department there are only two buildings which are known to contain asbestos; Mowden Hall in Darlington and Caxton House in London. As mentioned in my reply of 20 June my Department will comply fully with the new asbestos regulations.

Biology Teachers

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps the Teacher Training Agency plans to take to ensure that all newly qualified biology teachers have sufficient training to enable them to deliver basic out of classroom teaching in biology and other scientific disciplines. [125268]

Mr. Miliband: As one of the statutory requirements to be met before qualified teacher status can be awarded, trainee secondary teachers must be able to demonstrate a secure knowledge and understanding of the subject they are trained to teach. They must also be able to demonstrate that they can plan opportunities for pupils to learn in out-of-school contexts, including school trips, museum visits, field-work and employment-based settings, with the help of other staff where appropriate.

Carers Grant

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps the Government are taking to assist young carers. [122427]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 1 July 2003]:* We are taking a number of steps to help young carers.

We are providing funding through the Carers Special Grant. The grant is worth £100 million in 2003/04, of which 20 per cent. is earmarked for children's services, including young carers, which enable young carers to have a break.

We are also funding The Children's Society to undertake a three-year project, The Young Carers Initiative. This has involved direct consultation with young carers, leading to the publication last November,

with the Princess Royal Trust for Carers, of "Making it Work, Good practice with young carers and their families".

The Initiative supports more that 250 projects or groups across the country working with young carers, where they can go for advice, information and support or leisure. The Initiative has just entered its final year and is concentrating on developing standards for work with young carers.

Further, we are ensuring that young carers' needs are taken into account in developing work such as the National Service Framework for Children.

For further information I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) by the then Minister of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) on 21 May.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many children with a learning disability took short breaks enabled by funding from the carers grant in each year since 1997–98, broken down by each social services authority; [122336]

(2) what net expenditure from the carers grant on children with a learning disability by each social services authority in England *(a)* was in each year since 1997–98 and *(b)* is projected for the financial year 2003–04; [122384]

(3) how many children took short breaks enabled by funding from the carers grant in each year since 1997–98, broken down by social services authority. [122385]

Margaret Hodge: Since it was introduced in 1999, the funding for the carer's grant has increased year by year, and will continue to do so, as follows:

	£ million
1999–2000	20
2000–01	50
2001–02	70
2002–03	85
2003–04	100
2004–05	125
2005–06	185

20 per cent. of the carer's grant is earmarked for children's services. It is a matter for local authorities to determine local needs and distribute the carer's grant as they see fit. For this reason, information about how much money each local authority spends on services for children in general, and children with a learning disability, is not held centrally. Details about how many children with a learning disability from each social services authority took short breaks funded by the carer's grant are also not held centrally.

In 2001–02, 52,481 families were supported by children's services using the carer's grant. Before this date we did not collect data on the breakdown of spending of the carer's grant between children's and adult's services. This information will continue to be collected in future years.

Chair of Governors Award

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many individuals have studied successfully for the Chair of Governors award; and if he will make a statement on his policy on attracting, training and supporting school governors. [125021]

Mr. Miliband: Since June 2000, 21 governors from Essex, Cambridgeshire, Lewisham and Thurrock have been awarded the BTEC Higher Certificate for the Chair of Governors award developed by Essex LEA.

My right hon. Friend's policy on attracting, training and supporting school governors is to empower local education authorities and schools to deliver high quality support locally. The Department's school governor recruitment strategy offers support to locally based governor recruitment activities by LEAs and schools. We have produced the Help Schools Help Children information leaflet which promotes governorship and a supporting toolkit which offers advice and guidance on recruitment activities as well as publicity materials which can be adapted for local use. My Department also funds the School Governors' One Stop Shop which was established in November 1999 to recruit governors with business and management skills for inner city schools in Excellence in Cities (EiC) areas. In September 2002 this remit was extended to a number of other areas known to have serious vacancy problems.

Under my Department's National Strategy for Training and Supporting School Governors the first priority was to develop a National Training Programme for New Governors to ensure that all governors have the information they need to fulfil their statutory functions. The programme, which is delivered by LEA governor trainers, has been operating since September 2001. A Clerks' National Training Programme, developed for the Department by Consortium 52, a partnership involving LEAs in the North West, North East and Yorkshire and Humberside regions, together with the local diocesan bodies, is being rolled out to LEAs this summer. The programme supports a national job description for clerks, agreed after extensive consultation last year, and should increase awareness of this important role as well as ensure that clerks have the necessary skills and knowledge to support governing bodies effectively.

The third strand of the strategy is a National Development Programme for Heads and Chairs, which is currently being developed by the Eastern Leadership Centre (an Affiliated Centre for the National College of School Leadership) in partnership with governor services in nine eastern region LEAs in association with local Anglican and Catholic dioceses. The programme will provide skills training for chairs as well as joint development for heads and chairs linked to supporting a school improvement activity in the participants' schools, to develop joint leadership and effective team working. The Programme is due to be delivered to the Department at the end of March 2004.

All of these programmes build on existing good practice, provide mixed media resources, and offer self study as well as taught course materials to cater for a wide variety of preferred learning styles and access arrangements.

Child Care

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to *(a)* train and *(b)* recruit people in the child care sector; and if he will make a statement. [122221]

Margaret Hodge: Good quality child care helps to enhance outcomes for children. A skilled and qualified child care workforce is essential to meet our objectives to increase the availability of high quality child care for all age groups.

We provide for the training of child care workers through the Learning and Skills Council, and through funding allocated to local authorities and their Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships. It is for local LSCs and local authorities to assess needs in their areas and develop plans to ensure the training delivered best meets them. We issued joint guidance with LSC to encourage local planning for workforce development.

A national child care recruitment campaign has been running since 2000 to encourage people to consider a career in child care. It includes television and media advertising, a variety of customised information and materials, a national order line and a website with order facility. Local authorities promote careers in child care using a range of materials and events, working with local partners such as Jobcentre Plus, Careers Services, providers and sector organisations to provide practical help to potential recruits.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment has been made of the reasons why local authorities make reciprocal arrangements to pay for *(a)* nursery and *(b)* child care facilities. [121264]

Margaret Hodge: Prior to April 2003, cross border disputes arose typically because of differences between local education authorities' (LEAs') eligibility criteria and grant distribution. Guidance issued by the Sure Start Unit encourages LEAs to make reciprocal arrangements or otherwise to consider funding on a case by case basis. Nursery education funding is now allocated to LEAs through their Education Formula Spending Share. This is calculated on the basis of the latest data on pupil numbers and reflects provision for all children taking up a free place, regardless of where they live. From April 2004, there should be no need for reciprocal arrangements since all LEAs will have a statutory duty to provide a free nursery education place for every three year old whose parents want one.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the average cost for full day child care in each local education authority in England was in 2001–02; [120625]

(2) when he will reply to the question from the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington North, ref 120625 tabled on 17 June. [125633]

Margaret Hodge: 110 of the 150 local authorities responsible for reviewing child care in their areas supplied figures to the Department for the average weekly cost of full day child care in their areas in 2001–02. Their figures are not directly comparable since they may have been collected at different times during the year. The are now somewhat out of date and they reflect figures given to us by the local authorities themselves.

£

Local authority	*Average weekly cost of full day child care, 2001–02*
Barnsley	100
Bath and North East Somerset	124
Bedfordshire	127
Bexley	122
Birmingham	95
Blackburn with Darwen	80
Blackpool	84
Bolton	102
Bournemouth	110
Bradford	92
Brent	105
Brighton and Hove	111
Bristol	116
Bromley	160
Calderdale	95
Cambridgeshire	120
Camden	115
Cheshire	111
Cornwall	95
Coventry	100
Croydon	110
Cumbria	80
Darlington	89
Derby	86
Devon	81
Doncaster	100
Dorset	96
Dudley	92
Durham	100
Ealing	150
East Sussex	125
Enfield	144
Essex	120
Greenwich	130
Halton	141
Hammersmith and Fulham	174
Harrow	134
Hartlepool	84
Havering	131
Herefordshire	64
Hertfordshire	156
Hillingdon	157
Hounslow	170
Isle of Scilly	90
Isle of Wight	48
Kensington and Chelsea	126
Kingston upon Hull	91
Kingston-upon-Thames	175
Kirklees	100
Knowsley	90
Leeds	143
Leicester	117
Leicestershire	110
Lincolnshire	86
Liverpool	88
Luton	108
Manchester	108
Medway	111
Merton	150
Middlesbrough	55
Milton Keynes	109
North East Lincolnshire	89
Newcastle upon Tyne	140
Newham	101
North Lincolnshire	86
North Somerset	90
North Tyneside	111
North Yorkshire	90

£

Local authority	Average weekly cost of full day child care, 2001–02
Northamptonshire	60
Northumberland	123
Nottingham City	92
Nottinghamshire	95
Oldham	85
Oxfordshire	116
Poole	90
Portsmouth City	107
Reading	150
Redbridge	99
Redcar and Cleveland	75
Rotherham	99
Rutland	110
Sheffield	110
Shropshire	95
Slough	156
Solihull	101
Somerset	92
South Gloucestershire	123
South Tyneside	114
Southampton	125
Southwark	102
St. Helens	89
Stockport	126
Stoke-on-Trent	77
Suffolk	97
Tameside	91
Thurrock	104
Torbay	86
Wakefield	88
Walsall	76
Warrington	110
Warwickshire	110
West Berkshire	136
West Sussex	126
Westminster	120
Wigan	88
Wiltshire	92
Wirral	106
Wolverhampton	93
Worcestershire	93
York	108

Note:
Full day child care includes care for children under age eight for more than four hours in settings which are not domestic premises. All figures are rounded to the nearest whole pound.

Child Guardianship

Tim Loughton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs, how many children have been awaiting CAFCASS hearings on future guardianship for *(a)* three to four weeks, *(b)* five to eight weeks, *(c)* nine to 12 weeks and *(d)* more than 12 weeks. [120386]

Margaret Hodge: The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) does not make the decision to remove children from the care of their parents or guardians, or hold hearings on future guardianship. Court hearings are held to determine these questions. A CAFCASS practitioner represents the interests of a child during proceedings. The court considers all the evidence before it, including CAFCASS reports and makes the decision about the child's future. At the end of April 2003, CAFCASS were dealing with 12,245 public law cases (care, adoption, freeing orders and guardianship) that were at various stages between application and final hearing. Information on how many children are awaiting hearings on future guardianship is not held centrally and could not be collected without incurring disproportionate cost.

Children at Risk Green Paper

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 25 June, ref 121620, to which other reports the Green Paper on Children at Risk will make a substantive response. [122766]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 30 June 2003]:* The Green Paper on Children at Risk will make a formal response to the joint chief inspectors' report, "Safeguarding Children" and the Victoria Climbié Inquiry report.

Children's Centres

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of children's centres will be funded exclusively by his Department in *(a)* 2003, *(b)* 2004 and *(c)* 2005. [121894]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 26 June 2003]:* The Government are allocating resources to develop children centres, and to create 43,000 new child care places—£435 million in this spending review period, including £317 million capital. Local authorities are responsible for deciding how and where children's centre services will be delivered. The majority of centres will be developed from sure start local programmes, neighbourhood nurseries and early excellence centres. However, the sure start unit is also encouraging development from other existing provision in the maintained, voluntary and private sectors. Local authority strategic plans are due by mid October 2003; we cannot estimate what proportion of centres will be fully funded by DfES until these are received.

Consultation Documents

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the consultation documents issued by his Department in each of the last four years; what the cost was of producing each of these; how many documents were issued in each consultation; and how many responses were received in each consultation. [124579]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Early Years Education

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of three year-olds have access to early years education in *(a)* the Bury St Edmunds constituency, *(b)* Suffolk, *(c)* Norfolk, *(d)* Essex and *(e)* Cambridgeshire. [120411]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not available in the form requested.

The available information is shown in the table.

Number of free early years education places taken up by three year olds January 2002

Local education authority area	*Number of free early years education places taken up by three year olds*
Suffolk	4,200
Norfolk	4,800
Essex	8,700
Cambridgeshire	2,700

We have made the commitment that by April 2004, six months ahead of our original target, all three year olds whose parents want one, will have access to a free, part-time early education place.

Latest figures on three year olds in early years education providers were published by the Department in the Statistical First Release "Provision for Children Under Five Years of Age in England: January 2003 (Provisional) (15/2003)" in May 2003, a copy of which is available from the Library. An electronic copy of this publication is also available on the Department's web-site www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics.

Education Funding

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what additional funding over and above the standard allocations *(a)* was spent and *(b)* has been allocated by the Learning and Skills Council to assist colleges in financial health category C in (i) 2000–01, (ii) 2001–02 and (iii) 2002–03 from (A) participation, (B) Standards Fund and (C) other budget heads; [124702]

(2) how many further education colleges were assessed by the Learning and Skills Council or its predecessor bodies as being in financial health category C at *(a)* 31st March 2000, *(b)* 31 March 2001, *(c)* 31 March 2002 and *(d)* 31 March 2003; [124703]

(3) what steps have been taken by the Learning and Skills Council since April 2000 to assist colleges in financial health category C to improve their position. [124704]

Alan Johnson: These are matters for the Learning and Skills Council. John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

GCSE/GNVQ Point Scores

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what proportion of the average capped GCSE/GNVQ point scores was obtained by *(a)* GSCE results and *(b)* GNVQ results by pupils in (i) sports colleges, (ii) technology colleges, (iii) languages colleges and (iv) arts colleges in each year between 1995 and 2002; [123587]

(2) what proportion of the average capped GCSE/GNVQ point scores was obtained by *(a)* GCSE results and *(b)* GNVQ results by pupils in (i) grammar schools, (ii) secondary modern schools, (iii) non-specialist comprehensives and (iv) specialist comprehensives in each year between 1995 and 2002. [123591]

Mr. Miliband: The proportions of the GCSE/GNVQ point scores obtained by GCSEs and by GNVQs are shown in the table. The GCSE/GNVQ point score that has been used is the total uncapped GCSE/GNVQ point score, rather than the average capped GCSE/GNVQ point score, in order to be consistent with earlier years' data which were uncapped.

GCSE/GNVQ achievements of 15-year-old pupils in schools in England, 1995 to 2002

Academic year	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Sports colleges								
Percentage of total points from GCSEs	—	—	—	99.8	99.2	98.8	98.8	97.1
Percentage of total points from GNVQs	—	—	—	0.2	0.8	1.2	1.2	2.9
Technology colleges								
Percentage of total points from GCSEs	100	100	99.4	98.9	98.7	98.4	98	95.5
Percentage of total points from GNVQs	0	0	0.6	1.1	1.3	1.6	2	4.5
Language colleges								
Percentage of total points from GCSEs	—	100	99.9	99.8	99.3	99.2	99	98.1
Percentage of total points from GNVQs	—	0	0.1	0.2	0.7	0.8	1	1.9
Arts colleges								
Percentage of total points from GCSEs	—	—	—	98.9	99.3	99.1	98.8	96.6
Percentage of total points from GNVQs	—	—	—	1.1	0.7	0.9	1.2	3.4
Grammar schools								
Percentage of total points from GCSEs	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	99.9
Percentage of total points from GNVQs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.1
Secondary moderns								
Percentage of total points from GCSEs	100	100	99.6	99.5	99.3	98.8	98.5	96.7
Percentage of total points from GNVQs	0	0	0.4	0.5	0.7	1.2	1.5	3.3
Non specialist comprehensives								
Percentage of total points from GCSEs	100	100	99.8	99.7	99.5	99.3	99	97.6
Percentage of total points from GNVQs	0	0	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.7	1	2.4
Specialist comprehensives								
Percentage of total points from GCSEs	100	100	99.5	99.1	98.8	98.7	98.4	96.3
Percentage of total points from GNVQs	0	0	0.5	0.9	1.2	1.3	1.6	3.7

Growing Schools Programme

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools in Chesham and Amersham were involved in the Growing Schools Programme in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [123916]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: No schools in either Chesham or Amersham were involved in the Growing Schools programme in either 2001–02 or 2002–03. However, three schools from Buckinghamshire LEA, High Wycombe CE Primary, The Wycombe Grange Pupil Referral Unit and Verney Avenue Special School, were involved. They participated in one of the five flagship projects managed by Berkshire College of Agriculture and National Association of Principal Agricultural Education Officers between April 2002 and April 2003.

Independent Schools

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many prosecutions in relation to the inadequacies of boarding quarters have been brought by the National Care Standards Commission against *(a)* the Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference and Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools and *(b)* other independent boarding schools in each of the last five years. [125172]

Mr. Miliband: The National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) does not prosecute independent schools if there are inadequacies in their boarding provision. It reports deficiencies to the Department for Education and Skills which is the registration authority for independent schools.

My officials press independent schools to respond quickly to concerns raised by NCSC, and schools that fail to address these concerns may be served with a Notice of Complaint setting out the remedies we are seeking. If the concerns set out in the Notice of Complaint are not addressed, the Department will deregister and close the school.

During the last five years four boarding schools have been served with a Notice of Complaint on welfare grounds. One of these schools belonged to the Incorporated Association of Independent Schools, the others did not belong to the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference or any other association affiliated to the Independent Schools Council.

Learning and Skills Councils

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the relationship is between *(a)* Connexions, *(b)* LEAs, *(c)* young offenders institutions, *(d)* Jobcentre Plus and *(e)* learning and skills councils. [121776]

Margaret Hodge: They provide different forms of support to young people and adults. Where young people are at risk, it is particularly important that they work closely together.

The Connexions service provides information, advice, guidance and access to personal development opportunities for 13 to 19-year-olds. Its focus is on helping young people stay engaged in education, training and employment. Connexions partnerships support LEAs in a number of ways. For instance fines agree with them how they will contribute to the achievement of reducing unauthorised absence of young people from school.

Young offender institutions accommodate 15 to 21-year-olds. Many of these young people face many barriers to taking part in education, training or employment—e.g. they may have been in care, are substance abusers, and have mental health problems. Connexions provides access to holistic support that overcomes these barriers. Connexions partnerships are therefore developing strong links and formal agreements with young offender institutes in their areas.

Connexions and Jobcentre Plus work in close partnership to provide an efficient, supportive and integrated service to young people claiming benefit, with particular emphasis on those aged 16–17.

The Learning and Skills Council is responsible for all post-16 education and training. Connexions partnerships and local learning and skills councils have joint working strategies to ensure that all young people aged 16–19 receive appropriate learning and development opportunities.

Learning Disabilities

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures he supports to ensure that those with learning disabilities are not disadvantaged within the examination system. [124754]

Mr. Miliband: The Joint Council for General Qualifications (JCGQ) is responsible for determining the detailed regulations and guidance relating to candidates with particular requirements.

We support special measures that help those candidates for whom the standard arrangements for the assessment of their attainment may present an unnecessary barrier, where such measures do not affect the validity of the assessment.

Literacy (Battersea)

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the effect of the national literacy strategy on literacy skills amongst primary school children in Battersea. [123670]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The National Literacy Strategy (together with the National Numeracy Strategy) has transformed standards in our primary schools and the 2002 test results at age seven and 11 were the best ever. Nationally, 75 per cent. of pupils achieved level four or above in the 2002 Key Stage 2 English tests, 10 percentage points more than in 1998. Compared to 1998, about 60,000 more 11-year olds achieved the expected level for their age in English.

The achievement gap between high and low performing schools and local education authorities (LEAs) has also narrowed significantly. The lowest achieving LEA is now performing at around the level of the average LEA of five years ago and the percentage of schools achieving below 65 per cent. in English and maths has been roughly halved since 1998.

The improvement of literacy standards of pupils in Wandsworth LEA is broadly in line with the national improvement. In 1998 64 per cent. of pupils achieved level four or above in English at Key Stage 2. In 2002 the figure was 73 per cent. The Key Stage 2 results are provided at national, LEA, and school level. We are unable to disaggregate results for Battersea schools.

London Challenge Initiative

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* professional staff, *(b)* administrative staff and *(c)* consultants work on his Department's London Challenge initiative; what the total budget is for the initiative; and if he will make a statement. [123365]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The London Challenge is a major new programme of work to raise standards in London schools. Our recently published strategy document "The London Challenge: Transforming London Secondary Schools" sets out a comprehensive programme of work, including 20 new schools and 30 academies, intended to create a city as renowned for its learning and creativity as it already is for so many other things.

In announcing the London Challenge, the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris), announced that £25 million would be set aside over three years for the implementation of new initiatives arising from the programme, including £7.5 million for a major programme of leadership training and support in schools and £10 million for a new London gifted and talented centre. In addition, the programme of work set out in the strategy document involves a major focusing of national programmes (including, for example, the academies programme) on London—so that there will be very significant new investment in London over the next three years.

The programme is currently staffed by:

(a) 10 professional staff

(b) Nine civil servants

(c) One consultant.

Millennium Volunteer Projects

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance he issues to Government regional offices regarding the distribution of funding for millennium volunteer projects. [123288]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The funding which is to be allocated for 2004–05 and 2005–06 to each region will be finalised in September 2003. Government Offices for the Regions will be able to take decisions on how funding for local millennium volunteers activity in 2004–05 and 2005–06 is to be distributed within their regions. These decisions will take account of regional needs and will be informed by local discussions with key partners as well as the outcomes of a review of the formula which will determine the allocation of funds to each region. In making their decisions in late autumn, Government offices will take into account existing provision, the needs of young people, particularly those at risk, and the coverage across their region.

Minister for Children

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what age range the Minister for Children's responsibilities cover. [121827]

Margaret Hodge: My responsibilities cover the policies of the Department for Education and Skills for children, young people and their families from the child's conception to age 19, plus specific responsibility for certain vulnerable groups beyond 19 such as young people leaving care. Particular services and programmes may cover different age groups, depending on the nature of the service. I work closely with Ministers in a range of other Government departments responsible for delivery of services to children.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the Minister for Children has responsibility for *(a)* children in prison, *(b)* asylum-seeker children and *(c)* children of domestic violence victims in refuges. [121828]

Margaret Hodge: My responsibilities cover the services provided by the Department for Education and Skills for children in these particular situations. These include:

support for unaccompanied asylum seeking children;

ensuring an appropriate education for children of asylum seekers, young people in secure establishments, and children living in domestic violence refuges;

Connexions services for any of these young people aged 13–19;

SureStart programmes for families in refuges;

programmes supporting these children funded by the Children's Fund;

social care for all children and young people in secure establishments, and children living in domestic violence refuges.

I am also working with Ministers from other Departments in fulfilling their responsibilities for these children as follows:

the Home Office for services to children and young people in secure establishments, for asylum seeking children (both accompanied and unaccompanied);

the Department of Health, for healthcare for children; and

the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on funding for domestic violence refuges and their services.

As Minister for Children my role is to put children's needs at the heart of our services and to facilitate co-operation between different agencies and providers.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many times he and his predecessors met the Mayor of London in official meetings at the Department in each of the past three years. [122140]

Alan Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meets the Mayor of London from time to time, but detailed information requested is not maintained in the form requested.

Private Office Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the running costs have been of Ministers' private offices in his Department in each year since 1997. [123111]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested is in the table. This information includes the total running cost for the Department for Education and Skills and its predecessor, the Department of Education and Employment.

Financial year	*Running cost (£ million)*
2002–03	2.2
2001–02	2.1
2000–01	2.3
1999–2000	2.0
1998–99	1.9
1997–98	[1]

[1] Information not held in format requested

Education Provision (The Wrekin)

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of 11-year-olds in The Wrekin have achieved level 4 in each year since 1997 in *(a)* English and *(b)* maths. [124609]

Mr. Miliband: The table shows the percentage of pupils achieving level 4 or above in the Key Stage 2 English and maths tests in maintained schools in The Wrekin constituency between 1997 and 2002:

	The Wrekin	*England*
English KS2 test		
1997	62	63
1998	67	65
1999	71	71
2000	77	75
2001	78	75
2002	75	75
Maths KS2 test		
1997	62	62
1998	61	59
1999	68	69
2000	73	72
2001	69	71
2002	73	73

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students there were in further education in The Wrekin in each year since 1997. [124611]

Alan Johnson: The numbers of people resident in The Wrekin constituency who were students at Further Education colleges in each year since 1997/98 are shown in the table below. Due to the way the data are collected, figures prior to 2000/01 are only available for students funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), or as it was then, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Those not funded by the council are included for 2000/01, the latest full year for which information is available.

Numbers of people resident in The Wrekin constituency studying at Further Education colleges by year (thousands)

Academic year	*Council funded*	*Non-council funded*
1997/98	6,000	n/a
1998/99	6,200	n/a
1999/00	6,000	n/a
2000/01	6,500	1,600

Source:
Individualised Student Record

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* teachers and *(b)* classroom assistants in schools there were in The Wrekin in each year since 1997. [124610]

Mr. Miliband: The table shows the number of regular teachers and teaching assistants in maintained schools in Telford and Wrekin local education authority since 1999. Prior to this Telford and Wrekin was part of Shropshire LEA. 2002 is the latest year for which teacher data are available.

	Regular teachers[1]	*Teaching assistants*[2,3,4]
1999	1,360	260
2000	1,340	280
2001	1,410	370
2002	1,420	390
2003[5]	—	480

[1] Full-time equivalent teachers in post in the maintained schools sector.

[2] Includes nursery assistants, special needs support staff, minority ethnic pupil support staff.

[3] Includes non-maintained special schools and special and general hospital schools.

[4] Includes both full-time and the full-time equivalent of part-time.

[5] Provisional

Qualified Teacher Status

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to the oral answer of the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms), of 25 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 1047, how many of the additional 25,000 teachers have qualified teacher status; what status the remaining teachers have; and what their distribution is by *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary sectors. [123152]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 3 July 2003]:* The number of regular teachers in the maintained sector in England increased by 24,800 between January 1997 and January 2003 (provisional). The number of teachers with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) rose by 12,500. The number of teachers with professional qualifications obtained in countries outside the European Economic Area and instructors with special qualifications or experience of particular skills or subjects rose by 8,500. The remaining 3,800 of the increase is comprised of mature career-changers working towards QTS while working as teachers on employment-based training routes like the graduate teacher programme. These routes, which were first established in 1998, already provide over 10 per cent. of all newly-qualified teachers. Since autumn 2000, the earliest date for which these data are available, over 5,000 teachers on employment-based training programmes have been awarded QTS. Almost 900 of those have gained QTS since January 2003.

Data about teachers by phase of employment for January 2003 are not yet available in the form requested. Of the 24,800 increase 5,800 were in the maintained nursery and primary phase, 17,600 were in the maintained secondary phase and 1,400 were in maintained special schools, pupil referral units or education elsewhere.

Research

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much his Department has spent on research to help achieve its aims and objectives in each year since 1997. [124582]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* The Department has spent the following each year since 1997:

Research funding

	£ million
1997	4.4
1998	4.8
1999	6.2
2000	10.6
2001	8.2
2002	9.2

Sight Problems

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures he is introducing to improve screening of schoolchildren for sight problems. [119559]

Margaret Hodge: The Department of Health is responsible for the provision of eye checks undertaken by local primary health care teams in accordance with professional advice. The principal threats to eye health and impaired vision development should be detected, at or before school age, through health development checks or through a visual screening on school entry. Older children may develop myopia (short sight) which is usually recognised when they complain of difficulty seeing clearly at distance. Since the onset of myopia commonly occurs between the ages of nine and 16 it is not possible to identify optimum ages for screening. Children may "pass" a routine screening examination only to find problems within the next few months. Whenever parents or carers suspect that there is a problem with their child's sight they should take them to an optician. All children up to the age of 15 are entitled to free sight tests, as are children aged 16–18 if they are in full time education.

The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice provides practical advice to local education authorities, maintained schools and others on carrying out their statutory duties to identify, assess and make provision for children's special educational needs, including for children with visual impairment. The Code aims to promote consistency of approach, but, within its guidelines, it is for schools and LEAs to determine appropriate intervention based on an assessment of each child's individual needs and circumstances.

Teacher Leavers

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers have left the profession in each year since 1997. [125367]

Mr. Miliband: The table shows the numbers of teachers leaving[1] full-time or part time[2] service in the maintained schools sector in England since 1997. Data to 2001 are the most recent available.

[1] Leavers are those who were in full-time or part-time teaching in the maintained schools sector immediately before the period shown, who were not in service in that sector at the end of the period shown. It includes teachers that have retired. Teachers leaving are based on pension returns. Some teachers may have moved from known service to service not recorded on the teacher pension return. Some leavers will be taking career breaks and will return to service at a later date.

[2] Around 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-timers may not be included.

	Teachers leaving
1 April 1996 to 31 March 1997	35,650
1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998[1]	39,050
1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999	31,910
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000	34,930
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	35,440

[1] Higher than usual numbers of premature retirements, following changes to the retirement regulations, contributed to the high levels of leavers in 1997–98.

In 2000–01 40,300 teachers entered teaching full-time or part time in the maintained sector in England, including 13,000 teachers that had returned to teaching after previously leaving the profession.

Student Loans

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of outstanding student loans are *(a)* loans for maintenance and *(b)* loans for tuition fees. [124668]

Alan Johnson: Under current student support legislation, all outstanding student loans relate to loans for maintenance.

Teachers

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers have been employed in Leicestershire local education authority area in each year since 1996–97. [125251]

Mr. Miliband: The table shows the number of regular teachers in maintained schools in Leicestershire since January 1997. Prior to 1 April 1998 Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland were part of the former Leicestershire local education authority. 2002 is the latest year for which teacher data are available.

Full-time equivalent regular teachers (excluding occasional) in service in the maintained schools sector

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Former Leicestershire	7,690	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Leicestershire	n/a	4,800	4,860	4,930	5,020	5,040
Leicester	n/a	2,570	2,660	2,600	2,760	2,710
Rutland	n/a	250	260	220	240	250

n/a = not applicable

Teenage Pregnancy

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of teenage pregnancy literature produced by the Government; and if he will make a statement. [120771]

Margaret Hodge: The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy national campaign was launched in October 2000 with advertisements, aimed at boys and girls aged 13–17, running in popular teenage magazines and local independent radio. The campaign is supported by a freephone advice line and website. Local materials are also available for use by local teenage pregnancy strategies.

In the tracking survey carried out as part of the independent national evaluation of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, over 70 per cent. of 13–17 year olds recognised the advertisements, a level of recall associated with television advertising. The early success of the campaign was also recognised in the first annual report of the Independent Advisory Group on Teenage Pregnancy (2001). Since October 2000 the freephone advice line has advised over 8 million young people, around 50 per cent. of who were boys.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the impact of the cross-cutting teenage pregnancy strategy since its introduction in 1999. [120772]

Margaret Hodge: The most recent data for 2001 shows a 10 per cent. reduction in the under 18 conception rate and an 11 per cent. fall in the under 16 conception rate since 1998, the baseline year for the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. Participation of teenage parents in education, training or employment has doubled from 16 per cent. to 33 per cent.

These are early encouraging signs of progress towards meeting the Government's target to halve the under 18 conception rate by 2010 and increase to 60 per cent. the participation of teenage parents to reduce their long term risk of social exclusion.

However, evidence suggests that it takes many years to bring out the societal and behavioural changes required. That is why the Government have set out a 10-year Strategy.

HEALTH

Age Discrimination

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place copies of the strategic and operational plans that identify age discrimination as referred to on page 172 of the National Service Framework for Older People in the Library. [124584]

Dr. Ladyman: Copies of local plans are not held centrally. Information collated through strategic health authorities indicated that 91 per cent. of National Health Service organisations' strategic and operational plans include action to address identified age discrimination.

Ambulance Service

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the restructuring of ambulance services in Coventry; and what estimate he has made of the likely savings to be made from the restructuring. [124508]

Dr. Ladyman: Coventry Primary Care Trust (PCT) is responsible for commissioning services for the local health community. I understand that West Midlands Ambulance Service National Health Service Trust currently provides emergency ambulance cover to Coventry and the surrounding area.

I understand that, from 1 April 2004, Coventry PCT will be commissioning emergency ambulance services for the local health community from Warwickshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust. This decision is supported by the local health community and is part of a long-term strategy to deliver an emergency care network across Coventry and Warwickshire, with one ambulance service provider.

I am advised that this decision is a strategic one and not about reducing costs. The investment in ambulance services by Coventry PCT will remain broadly the same.

Ashworth Special Hospital

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his policy is on the re-engagement of retired employees at Ashworth Special Hospital to vacant posts at the establishment; [123555]

(2) what his policy is on employees of Ashworth Special Hospital and the statutory retirement age; and if he will make a statement. [123556]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Members of staff who have retired from Ashworth Hospital are not re-employed into substantive positions.

In common with other National Health Service organisations, employees who have retired at Ashworth are not formally re-employed. However, there are occasions when retired staff can return to work at the hospital on a 'temporary basis'.

Audit Commission Acute Hospital Survey

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the cost is of the Acute Hospital Portfolio survey by the Audit Commission; and if he will make a statement; [125563]

(2) if he will place a copy of the Compare CD rom by the Audit Commission, detailing performance of primary care trusts under the Acute Hospital Portfolio in the Library. [125564]

Mr. Hutton: The Audit Commission is an independent body and inquiries about its operations should be addressed to the Commission itself.

National Blood Service

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what impact on the annual blood supply there will be from the introduction of short-term donation bans on donors who have visited areas where emerging pathogens and viruses are notified. [123389]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The National Blood Service (NBS) has recently introduced deferral bans for blood donors, which apply to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and West Nile Fever virus. The NBS expects that this will reduce donations by 15,000 units.

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish national guidelines on alternatives to blood transfusions; [123382]

(2) when the National Network of Transfusion Committees will publish its guidance on better blood transfusion and alternatives. [123384]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The National Blood Service appropriate use of blood group is drawing up specific guidance on strategies for the appropriate use of blood and the use of alternatives to donor blood. Guidance is expected to be available for consideration by the Chief Medical Officers National Blood Transfusion Committee later this year, when a publication route and timetable will be discussed.

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he intends to publish the results of the survey of hospital transfusion committees on Appropriate Use of Blood HSC 2002/009; [123386]

(2) when he will publish the results of the National Transfusion Committee audit of blood transfusion initiatives. [123387]

Miss Melanie Johnson: An audit by the National Blood Service to review the implementation of Health Service Circular 2002/009, Better Blood Transfusion—Appropriate Use of Blood, issued in July 2002 is currently underway. The results will be submitted to the National Blood Transfusion Committee later this year when the publication route and timetable will be discussed.

In addition, the Royal College of Physicians and the National Blood Service National Comparative Audit Team are undertaking collaborative transfusion audits.

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many units of red blood cells were commissioned for use in the NHS in each of the last five years. [123388]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information on the number of red cell units issued by the National Blood Service to hospitals in England and North Wales for the last five years is shown in the table.

	Red cell units issued
1998–99	2,213,000
1999–2000	2,243,000
2000–01	2,229,000
2001–02	2,206,000
2002–03	2,186,000

Notes:

1. This includes issues to private hospitals
2. The figures shown include paediatric red cells. As these smaller units are produced by dividing a donation of blood, the numbers of these units have been aggregated into full unit equivalents and added to the total.

Cancer Services

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by strategic health authority how much money has been allocated to cancer services *(a)* overall and *(b)* by specific area in each of the financial years from 2003 to 2006. [124347]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Resources for funding cancer services have been included in general primary care trust (PCT) allocations for 2003–04. PCTs are receiving an additional £12.7 billion over the three years from 2003–04 to 2005–06. It is for PCTs, in partnership with strategic health authorities and other local stakeholders, to determine how best to use their funds to meet national priorities, including the targets set for cancer in "Improvement, Expansion and Reform: the next three years—Priorities and Planning Framework 2003 to 2006."

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the Government plans to spend to modernise cancer equipment over the next three years; and which pieces of cancer equipment will be replaced with new equipment. [124393]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Over the next three years, £165 million will be invested by the Government to modernise equipment used for the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

Computed tomography and magnetic resonance imaging scanners installed in or before 1996, and linear accelerators installed in or before 1995 will be replaced through the central investment.

Children's Fund

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria are used to award grants from the Children's Fund; and if he will list the *(a)* recipients and *(b)* amounts received of awards from the Children's Fund since it was established. [122461]

Margaret Hodge: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the shadow commissioners who have been appointed to help establish the new Commission for Healthcare and Inspection which will be operational from April 2004; and for which companies they work. [124392]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The following have been appointed as shadow commissioners.

Khurshid Alam is a personnel manager with St. Mungo's Housing Association. Previously he was Chief Executive of the National Association of Race Equality Councils. He is Chair of Race Agenda and a lay member of the Employment Tribunal, a lay member for Mental Health Review Tribunal and member or chair of a number of community organisations.

Sarah Blackburn is chief executive of a consultancy specialising in the development of business risk management assurance and audit capabilities. She has been head of internal audit and risk management in Argos plc, Kingfisher plc, RAC plc and Exel plc. She is a member of the Audit Committee of the Open University and the Internal Auditing Committee of the Audit and Assurance Faculty of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. She chairs the Technical Development Committee of the Institute of Internal Auditors.

Michael Hake is Corporate Director, Social Care and Performance at Solihull Metropolitan Council. He has been a board member of the National Care Standards Commission since its establishment in April 2001. He is also a member of the Patient Information Advisory Group (Advisory NDPB) and of the Health Records and Data Protection Review Group.

Bruce Keogh is a consultant cardiothoracic surgeon at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust where he has been Associate Medical Director for Clinical Governance. He is a member of the NHS Standing Medical Advisory Committee, the National Taskforce for Coronary Heart Disease and a Commissioner of the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI). He chairs the joint CHI and Audit Commission National Service Frameworks Programme Board which reviews the implementation of the National Service Frameworks in England and Wales. He is active in the NHS Information Authority, Society of Cardiothoracic Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland, Royal College of Surgeons and internationally.

Melinda Letts is a self-employed health policy consultant and executive/life coach working with voluntary, public and private sector clients. She is also Chairwoman of the Long-term Medical Conditions Alliance, an alliance of 118 health charities working for people with long-term conditions, was chief executive of the National Asthma Campaign from 1992 to 1998 and is Deputy Chair of the General Practice Airways Group, an educational charity for health professionals in respiratory care. She has been a Commissioner with the Commission for Health Improvement since November 1999 and a member of the NHS Modernisation Board since September 2000.

Nicholas Partridge is Chief Executive of the Terrence Higgins Trust, the leading HIV/AIDS charity in the UK. He is Chair of Consumers in NHS Research and Development, a Trustee of International Family Health and has been a Commissioner for the Commission for Health Improvement since November 1999.

Kamlesh Patel is Director of the Centre for Ethnicity and Health and current Chairman of the Mental Health Act Commission. He is also a non-executive board member and Chairman of the Audit Committee of The National Treatment Agency, a member of the Department of Health Mental Health Workforce Task Group and is non-executive board member, executive member and Trustee of a number of voluntary organisations including Lifeline UK, DrugScope UK, Men's Health Forum.

Shirley Pearce is Pro-Vice Chancellor and Professor of Health Psychology at the University of East Anglia. She is a clinical psychologist by profession and has been employed in both NHS and University settings. She led the development of health professional education and research programmes at the University of East Anglia which includes the University's successful bid for, and implementation of, a new medical school. She is currently the Director of the Centre for Inter-professional Practice at UEA and a non executive director of Norfolk Suffolk and Cambridgeshire SHA.

John Scampion is the Commissioner for Immigration Services. For five years he was the Social Fund Commissioner for Great Britain. He is a member of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board and a former non-executive director of South Warwickshire Combined Hospital NHS Trust. He was Town Clerk and Chief Executive of the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull from 1977–1995.

Iqbal Singh is a Consultant Physician in Medicine for the Elderly and a Professor in Ethnicity and Health. He is also the Regional Sub-Dean for the Royal Society of Medicine and has played a significant role in providing leadership to various professional organisations including as Director of the Indian Medical Association, Divisional Chairman of BMA and ODA and Member of the BMA's National Committee on Community Care. His interests include professional development and training and diversity, social cohesion and delivery of health care to ethnic communities for which he had contributed nationally and internationally.

Paul Streets is the Chief Executive of Diabetes UK. He is a member of the NHS Modernisation Board and the only lay member of the Royal College of Physicians Council. In 2002 he chaired the Board advising on the transition to the new patient and public involvement structures within the NHS.

Stephen Thornton is Chief Executive of The PPP Foundation (shortly to become The Health Foundation), an independent foundation encouraging leadership and innovation in healthcare. He was previously Chief Executive of the NHS Confederation and a health authority Chief Executive. He is a member of the Governing Council of the Open University.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the person for whom the records are held will have the right to be informed that their records have been inspected and copies taken which will be removed from the premises under Clause 86(1) of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill. [122960]

Dr. Ladyman: The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) will be subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA 1998).

The CSCI will therefore be required to provide 'fair processing information' to persons whose records are inspected, unless:

there is disproportionate effort in doing so

they are satisfied that the subjects have already been adequately informed, or

in the case of an investigation, to do so would prejudice the investigation.

Under the DPA 1998, organisations that will be subject to CSCI or other inspections must also ensure that patients are made aware that their records may be accessed by CSCI and the reasons why this may be necessary.

Contingency Plans

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the dissemination of lessons learned from major incident exercises by the Health Protection Agency will be made public. [121346]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The primary purpose of all major incident exercises is to identify lessons that can be used internally as a means of improving plans and training in all participating organisations. The Health Protection Agency (HPA) ensures that rigorous debriefing takes place following such events and that specific lessons are identified and shared with national health service and other participating organisations. An executive summary of the report of exercises—specifically identifying any general lessons learnt—will be placed on the HPA website at www.hpa.org.uk to ensure that the information is more widely disseminated.

Correspondence

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the letter of 26 June from the honourable Member for Sutton and Cheam regarding Mr.A.Dharsi, a constituent. [124562]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 10 July 2003.

Eating Disorders

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines have been issued by his Department on supporting carers of patients with anorexia. [125095]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department of Health issued guidance in November 2002 called "Developing services for carers and families of people with mental illness", which will be of value to all those carers supporting people with mental health problems, including patients with anorexia.

The NHS Plan set a target for 2004 that 700 more staff will be recruited to increase the breaks available for carers and to strengthen carer support networks. In pursuance of this target, all regular carers of people with mental health problems will have been identified, received an assessment and have their own care support plans by 2004. By 2004, local support networks for these carers will have been developed. The statutory and voluntary sector currently provides support to carers.

Erectile Dysfunction

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ask the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to evaluate the *(a)* clinical and *(b)* cost effectiveness of providing PDE5 inhibitors on the NHS for treatment of erectile dysfunction. [123431]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We have no plans to ask the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to evaluate the clinical and cost effectiveness of providing PDE5 inhibitors on the National Health Service for erectile dysfunction. A review of the current policy was conducted as recently as 2001.

Food Standards

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are being taken *(a)* to detect the increased use of foreign animal hydrolysed proteins in meat consumed in the UK and *(b)* to ensure traceability and detectability. [119065]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Further to the discovery of the use of hydrolysed proteins from non-chicken origin in chicken products on sale in the UK in late 2001, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) undertook a co-ordinated enforcement exercise with 20 local authorities. The exercise targeted those companies and products where use of hydrolysed proteins of non-chicken origin had previously been found. The results indicated that of the 25 formal samples taken, 12 tested positive for non-chicken DNA (either pork or in one case pork and beef).

The FSA is taking action to reduce the use of hydrolysed proteins of non-chicken origin in chicken products. As a result of the enforcement exercise, local authorities are taking follow-up action with the importers and suppliers of mislabelled chicken products, and will be making regular checks. The companies using these hydrolysed proteins can be identified from the licensed health marks used on these products, therefore the FSA is also working closely with the Dutch authorities to increase sampling and inspection of these manufacturers. Formal action has recently been taken against five Dutch processors. Following FSA pressure, the European Commission has agreed to improve rules on labelling of meat products with added water, but the FSA is calling in addition for a limit on added water of 15 per cent. and a ban the use of non-poultry proteins in this type of poultry product.

Food Supplements

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends to make it his policy to consult industry and to produce a list of those nutrients and nutrient sources which are legally available in food supplements but which are not listed as acceptable for such use in the Schedules to the proposed Food Supplements (England) Regulations 2003; and if he will publish such a list in the Official Report. [124157]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Food Standards Agency (FSA), which has responsibility for policy on food supplements, has no plans to ask industry to produce such a list.

Industry has already provided the FSA with information on those nutrients and nutrient sources currently marketed in the United Kingdom but missing from the Schedules to the Food Supplement (England) Regulations 2003. For lists of missing nutrients and nutrient sources, may I refer the hon. Member to the responses I gave the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on Monday 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 142W and 181W.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dossiers are being prepared by the food supplements industry for submission to the EU Scientific Committee for Food in relation to nutrients and nutrient sources which are legally available in food supplements, but which are not listed as acceptable for such use in the Schedules to the proposed Food Supplements (England) Regulations 2003. [124158]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Industry representatives have informed the Food Standards Agency that 24 safety dossiers are currently being prepared to support the addition of missing substances to the permitted lists in the Annexes to the Food Supplements Directive.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implications for animal testing of nutrients and nutrient sources of the requirements of the Food Supplements Directive that dossiers must be submitted for consideration by the European Scientific Committee for Food in relation to nutrients and nutrient sources which are legally available in food supplements, but which are not listed as acceptable for such use in the Schedules to the proposed Food Supplements (England) Regulations 2003. [124159]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The lists of permitted vitamins/minerals and their sources in the Food Supplements Directive may be extended following assessment, by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), of dossiers of information supporting the use of additional vitamins and minerals and their sources.

It is not possible to predict what implications dossier requirements may have for animal testing. Guidance on dossier content, issued by the former European Union Scientific Committee on Food, does not stipulate that data should be from animal testing and states that the available data should be submitted in the first instance. The need to generate new data will be assessed on a case-by-case basis; it will depend upon the extent and nature of data already available and any safety considerations that need to be addressed. It will be for the petitioner to decide on the most appropriate data package.

In recognition of the difficulties associated with compilation of dossiers, the Food Standards Agency has been pressing the EFSA for an urgent, substantive discussion involving representatives of relevant interest groups. The European Commission supports this move. The EFSA has responded positively and we expect a meeting to be arranged soon.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what date food supplement products will be required to be removed from the market if they contain nutrients and nutrient sources which are not listed as acceptable for such use in the Schedules to the proposed Food Supplements (England) Regulations 2003. [124160]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Food Supplements (England) Regulations 2003 will come into force on 1 August ,2005. From that date, the sale of food supplements containing vitamins or minerals not in the Schedules will be prohibited, unless the criteria in regulation 5(3), which permit continued sale until 1 January 2010, are met.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received from the National Association of Health Stores in relation to the provisions of the Food Supplements Directive and the Food Supplements (England) Regulations; and what response he has made to those representations. [120435]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Ministers have received a number of recent written representations from, and on behalf of, the National Association of Health Stores (NAHS) expressing NAHS's concerns over the impact of the Food Supplements Directive and the implementing regulations. In particular, NAHS voiced particular concerns over the current composition of the lists of permitted substances in the annexes to the Directive and asked that the United Kingdom seek an amendment to the Directive.

Ministers have responded recognising those concerns and setting out the Government's view that there was no possibility of negotiations on the Directive being reopened. Many Member States wanted a much more restrictive regime.

No aspect of the Directive needs to be implemented by the industry until 1 August 2005 and the Food Supplements (England) Regulations 2003 make use of flexibility in the Directive that means marketing of some products may not be affected until 1 January 2010.

Food supplements containing vitamins and minerals and their sources missing from the positive lists, that were on the market when the Directive came into force may continue to be marketed beyond 1 August 2005 provided that dossiers to support their addition to the positive lists have been submitted to the European Commission before 12 July 2005 and provided that the European Food Safety Authority has not given a negative opinion on such use.

Free Prescriptions

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost of providing free prescriptions to all patients in England. [124625]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We estimate that the loss of prescription charge income in England would be around £446 million in 2003–04. Additionally, there could be significant additional costs to the drugs bill if people who currently pay charges sought prescriptions for medicines and other items which they currently purchase.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce free prescriptions for those aged 21 or under who are not in full time employment. [124882]

Ms Rosie Winterton: People aged 21 or under who are not in full time employment are entitled to free national health service prescriptions if they hold a maternity or medical exemption certificate; receive income support or income based jobseekers' allowance, are named on a Tax Credit NHS exemption certificate; or hold a NHS low income scheme exemption certificate for full help.

Patients who pay charges and need frequent prescriptions may benefit from purchasing a prescription prepayment certificate.

General Practitioners

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the accreditation and payment plans of GPs with special interests; [124344]

(2) whether mental health is included in the new sets of guidelines for GPs with special interests; and if he will make a statement. [124396]

Mr. Hutton: Mental health is one of the new guidelines for general practitioners with a special interest (GPwSI) published by the Department of Health on 24 April. These guidelines were commissioned from the Royal

College of General Practitioners. They link closely with relevant national service frameworks and draw on good practice and experience nationally to offer support to primary care trusts (PCTs) in extending the range of services offered in primary care. Accreditation and remuneration of GPwSIs are both matters for PCTs to determine locally except, in future, where the GPwSI service falls within the scope of a national enhanced service under the new general medical services contract, when national benchmark prices will apply as a minimum price.

Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he expects the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection to give notice where it intends to enter and inspect premises under clause 62 of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill. [121175]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We expect that the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection (CHAI) will normally enter and inspect premises by agreement with their owners.

However it will be for CHAI to decide whether it is appropriate to give notice that it intends to enter premises using the power in Clause 60 (formerly Clause 62) of the Bill.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria he has set for the right of entry to be considered necessary or expedient under clause 63 of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill. [121176]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Secretary of State has set no criteria for the right of entry to be considered necessary or expedient under clause 65: Right of entry: supplementary (formerly clause 63) of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether a person working at the premises will have the right to refuse to be interviewed under clause 63(1)(c)(i) of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill. [121179]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Clause 61 (formerly clause 63(1)(c)(i)) gives the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection (CHAI) power to interview in private any person working at premises which CHAI is inspecting. Clause 61(5) provides that it would be an offence to obstruct CHAI in the exercise of its functions, and this provision is intended to make clear (mirroring existing provision in the Care Standards Act) that a manager must not prevent any person who consents to being interviewed by CHAI being interviewed. In certain circumstances, which will be set out in detail in regulations to be made under clause 61 of the Bill, CHAI will be able to require prescribed persons to give explanations of prescribed matters to CHAI. Failure without reasonable excuse to do so in these circumstances would be a criminal offence.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection will give notice where it requires a person to provide it with information, records and other items under Clause 64 of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill; where a person is required to provide it with information and records, if these will be protected under the Data Protection Act 1998; and if he will put in place safeguards in such cases to ensure *(a)* that only records relevant to an investigation are requested and *(b)* that an individual's right to privacy is protected. [121182]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We expect that the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection (CHAI) will normally obtain information by agreement. Where it exercises the power in clause 62 (previously 64) to require the provision of information or documents, we expect that it will normally do so in writing. Individuals' rights to privacy will be protected by the offence of disclosure of confidential information in Clause 129 of the Bill and also by the Data Protection Act. Under clause 62(1)(b), CHAI may only request information and documents which it considers necessary or expedient to have for the purposes of Chapter 3.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what, under Clause 60 of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill, will be the specified factors that will determine a fee by the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection; [121190]

(2) who, under Clause 60 of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill, will appoint the independent person or panel who will be able to review the amount charged by the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection in respect of fees for its reviewing and investigating functions; and what their terms of reference will be. [121192]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Section 57(7) (formerly section 60(7)) will allow the Secretary of State to set out in regulations provision for an independent person or panel to review fees payable in particular classes of cases under section 57(1). These regulations may also include any terms of reference the Secretary of State considers appropriate.

Under section 57(3) (formerly section 60(3)) the Secretary of State may also specify in regulations the factors that the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection must take into account in determining any fee payable under section 57(1).

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection will require a notice period to be given to make available for inspection a report published by it under Clause 61 of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill; [121193]

(2) whether, under Clause 61 of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill, there will be a scale of fees for providing *(a)* a copy of a report published by the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection and *(b)* other information relevant to the discharge of the Commission's functions. [121194]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Clause 59 (formerly Clause 6) stipulates that the Commission and Healthcare Audit and Inspection (CHAI) must make copies of any report published by it under Chapter 3 of the Health and Social

Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill available for inspection at its offices by any person at a reasonable time. It does not provide for CHAI to require that a period of notice be given beforehand.

It also provides for CHAI to charge a fee for copies of any report published by it under Chapter 3 of the Bill or to supply other information relevant to the discharge of its functions under this chapter.

It will be for CHAI to determine what constitutes a reasonable fee for any requested report and for any other additional information that an individual may request.

Health Records

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress his Department has made in investigating the pulping of the public health files in 1974. [124892]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* An informal review is being undertaken by the Department of Health to clarify the facts surrounding the drive for United Kingdom self sufficiency in blood products in the 1970s and 1980s. The review is based on papers available from the time and is not addressing allegations that files from that period went missing.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to ensure that patients are given access to their medical records relating to plasma; and if he will make a statement. [124894]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* It is the responsibility of individual national health service organisations to ensure that they comply with legal requirements when dealing with requests for access to health records. The Data Protection Act 1998 provides individuals with a right of access to their health records. However there are certain circumstances in which the record holder may withhold information.

Access may be denied, or limited, where the information might cause serious harm to the physical or mental health or condition of the patient, or any other person, or where giving access would disclose information relating to or provided by a third person who had not consented to the disclosure. The decision over whether to grant or withhold access must be made by individual record holders. However individuals do have recourse to the NHS complaints procedure if they feel that their application for access has not been dealt with appropriately.

Health Service Contracts

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the new *(a)* GP and *(b)* dental contracts will include provision for compulsory clinical negligence indemnity; and if he will make a statement. [124028]

Ms Rosie Winterton: General medical and dental practitioners working under local contracts are already obliged to carry indemnity cover by their contracts with primary care trusts. Practice providers of primary medical services under a general medical services contract will also be required to ensure indemnity cover for the practice as a result of the new contracts they will hold with primary care trusts from April 2004. Similar provision is expected under the new general dental services contracts.

Lancashire Teaching Hospitals Trust

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the introduction of foundation hospitals on Lancashire Teaching Hospitals Trust. [124902]

Mr. Hutton: In line with the principle of earned autonomy for the first wave of national health service foundation trusts, only acute and specialist NHS trusts which have attained three stars in the NHS performance ratings were eligible to apply.

Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust has two stars, which means that it is not eligible to apply for NHS foundation trust status at present. However, with mechanisms, including the recently announced improvement programme, in place to raise the performance of all NHS trusts, it is expected that all NHS trusts will have the opportunity to apply for NHS foundation trust status within the next five years.

Male Impotence Drugs

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost has been of male impotence drugs to the national health service in each year since they were added to Schedule 11 of the Selected List Of NHS Drugs. [123430]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of prescription items and Net Ingredient Cost (thousands) of products for treatment of impotence prescribed in GP practices in England and dispensed in the community, 1999-00 to 2002-03

£000

	Number of prescription items (Thousand)	Net ingredient cost
1999-2000	518.1	17,465.1
2000-01	720.8	23,393.1
2001-02	914.2	29,301.7
2002-03	1,097.0	35,261.9

Notes:
1. The therapeutic classifications are based on British National Formulary section 7.4.5 (Drugs for erectile dysfunction).
2. The data is based on prescriptions prescribed in GP practices in England which are dispensed in the community. Hospital and private prescriptions are not included.
3. The net ingredient cost (NIC) refers to the cost of the drug before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees. It does not include any adjustment for income obtained where a prescription charge is paid at the time the prescription is dispensed or where the patient has purchased a pre-payment certificate.

Source:
Prescribing Analyses and Cost (PACT) from the Prescription Pricing Authority.

Independent Review

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 7 July 2003, ref 123300, what the terms of reference are of the independent review; and when it will report. [125383]

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Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* The review will cover the process of reviewing eligibility criteria, arrangements to ensure that those criteria are applied consistently, the information provided to patients and the operation of complaints procedures. It is expected to report in March 2004.

Medical Devices

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce national standards for training in the use of medical devices. [124173]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The training in the use of medical devices is the responsibility of national health service hospital trusts' chief executives, who must follow the guidance of the Controls Assurance Standards to ensure that all staff are adequately trained to use all equipment they need to work with.

Mental Health

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he will take to improve the treatment of those suffering from acute personality disorders. [124877]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government are committed to improving the care, treatment and management of people with personality disorder. One component of the work is the provision of appropriate assessment and treatment services for the small number of people with severe personality disorder (probably less than 2,500 nationally) who pose a continued risk to others. New facilities, in both prisons and secure psychiatric hospitals, will evaluate what the most effective methods of treatment are and consider how people can be helped back into society. This is known as the Dangerous and Severe Personality Disorder (DSPD) Programme.

In addition, "Personality disorder: no longer a diagnosis of exclusion"—policy implementation guidance for the development of services for people with personality disorder—was published by National Institute for Mental Health in England in January 2003. This guidance builds on standards four and five in the national service framework for mental health and sets out how services for people with personality disorder should be developed. It brings this often neglected and isolated area of mental health into focus for the first time.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's policy is on the separation of mental health patients with differing degrees of mental illness. [125094]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Clinical assessment of need is the key to effective ward organisation. "Mental Health Policy Implementation Guide on Adult Acute Inpatient Care Provision" (2002) and "Safety, Privacy and Dignity in Mental Health Units" (2000) provides the principles of achieving such effective organisation in detail.

The guides state that the focus should be on admission to the most appropriate setting in line with the patient's needs within a whole system approach. It also reiterates the need to have clear admission and bed management protocols in place, as well as the necessary clinical governance arrangements to monitor and address concerns in respect of unmet needs.

MRI Scanners

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the staffing levels for operating the MRI scanners in Shropshire NHS trusts. [125146]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how old the MRI scanner at the Princess Royal Hospital, Telford is. [125148]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* I understand that the magnetic resonance imaging scanner at the Princess Royal Hospital was originally manufactured in 1989. It was installed at the Princess Royal Hospital in January 1995. In 1998, a major upgrade was carried out, which brought the scanner up to the latest specification.

National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse has to locate staff within the Government Office of the North West area during 2003; and when this will be. [124384]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Since 7 July 2003, the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse has had one regional manager and two support staff based in the Government office in the North West. Two additional members of staff are expected to take up their posts later this summer.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to ensure that patients seeking a new dentist are able to continue receiving NHS treatment. [124626]

Ms Rosie Winterton: General dental practitioners are independent contractors and, as such, are free to choose the proportions of national health service or private dentistry they wish to provide. Under NHS terms of service, dentists who stop offering NHS treatment are required to complete any outstanding treatment on the NHS or notify the appropriate primary care trust (PCT) if this is not possible.

Where dentists withdraw from providing NHS dentistry, PCTs can apply to the Secretary of State for agreement to fund salaried dental practitioners under section 56 of the 1977 NHS Act.

NHS Direct can put patients in touch with sources of NHS dentistry including community dental services, dental access centres and general dental practitioners offering treatment under general dental services.

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to prevent dentists removing from their list patients who receive NHS treatment. [124627]

Ms Rosie Winterton: General dental practitioners are independent contractors and, as such, are free to choose the amount of national health service or private dentistry they wish to provide.

Under the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill, the intention is to move to practice based contracts which will allow alternative ways of rewarding dentists to provide a defined level of service for a given number of people. Dentists will receive a more secure income in return for making a longer term commitment to the NHS.

NHS Recruitment

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much it cost the *(a)* Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership, *(b)* Lancashire Care and *(c)* South West London and St. George's Mental Health NHS Trusts to place the job advertisement in the Nursing Times on 17 June. [122403]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not collected centrally.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards the targets of *(a)* 7,500 consultants and 2,000 general practitioners by 2004 and *(b)* 15,000 consultants and general practitioners by 2008. [120441]

Mr. Hutton: Between September 1999 and September 2002, the number of consultants working in the National Health Service increased by 3,749 from 23,321 to 27,070.

Between September 1999 and September 2002, the number of general practitioners working in the NHS increased by 735 from 28,467 to 29,202.

Out-patient Appointments

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of *(a)* new and *(b)* follow-on out-patient appointments were cancelled at (i) Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Trust, (ii) Royal Bolton hospitals, (iii) Salford Royal hospitals and (iv) Warrington hospital in each year since 1999. [123660]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* The number of cancelled out-patient appointments, either by the hospital or by the patient, is not collected centrally by the Department of Health.

Information is available for each national health service trust and primary care trust on the number of patients who do not attend their out-patient appointment without giving prior notice. This information is published on the Department's website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

Private Healthcare

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what areas of private healthcare are to be transferred to the new Commission for Healthcare Audit and Improvement under the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill; [123038]

(2) what areas of private healthcare are regulated by the National Care Standards Commission; [123039]

(3) what steps he is taking to ensure a comprehensive system of regulation for all private healthcare is in place. [123040]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Under the Care Standards Act 2000 the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) is responsible for the regulation of independent health care and social care. The term 'independent health care' refers to private or voluntary establishments or agencies that provide care by medical practitioners, and such providers are registered as independent hospitals, independent clinics or independent medical agencies. Subject to Parliamentary approval of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill, the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection (CHAI) will take over responsibility for the regulation of independent health care from April 2004.

The NCSC is also responsible for the regulation of care homes in which nursing is provided, and nurses' agencies, but these are classified as social care and responsibility for their regulation will transfer to the Commission for Social Care Inspection from April 2004.

The Government have already ensured that a comprehensive system of regulation of private health care is in place by introducing the Care Standards Act, which has made unprecedented improvements on previous regulatory schemes. These include increased scope of regulation, a single regulator to promote consistency of application, national minimum standards and powers to inspect clinical performance. This will continue under CHAI.

Ritalin

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in each primary care trust aged up to four have been prescribed Ritalin in each of the last five years. [124236]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 8 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 783–84W, on age-related prescribing of methylphenidate hydrochloride (Ritalin) in primary care trusts. Additionally, this controlled drug is licensed for use in the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder only in children aged six years and above.

Sexual Health

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to design NHS sexual health services which are aimed at appealing to young men. [125159]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In implementing the national strategy for sexual health and HIV, the Department of Health has published a sexual health promotion toolkit, which provides practical advice to those working in the field of sexual health promotion with young men, to ensure that they are proactively targeted and that services are open and welcoming. Also, the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy recognises that increasing the involvement of boys and young men in decisions about sexual health is crucial and young men are, therefore, included in all aspects of the strategy. The Department is also funding the Men's Health Forum to investigate men's perceptions and attitudes towards chlamydia and to identify the best way to target men, both with information and for screening.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a chlamydia screening programme for young women. [125160]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department is already rolling out a national chlamydia screening programme for young women. Indeed, screening for chlamydia is now widely available in local national health service sexual health (genito-urinary medicine) clinics. Following the successful completion of a pilot study, 10 areas, covering 30 primary care trusts and over 400 individual testing sites, are developing an improved screening programme within a standard framework, which we are extending further.

Smacking

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been commissioned on the percentage of parents who smack their children. [122446]

Margaret Hodge: In January 2000, the Government consulted on what the legal position should be on the physical punishment of children, in Protecting Children, Supporting Parents. There were over 830 responses to the consultation in England, over 500 of these from individuals. The consultation did not specifically ask about smacking behaviour. However, the results showed that about 70 per cent. of individual respondents were in favour of keeping the status quo with regard to the smacking of children by parents.

A 1998 Office for National Statistics (ONS) Omnibus Survey of attitudes towards physical punishment found that 88 per cent. of respondents agreed that it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child.

Smoking

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people who *(a)* took up smoking and *(b)* permanently stopped smoking in each year since 1997. [122457]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for public health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears) to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Paul Flynn) on 6 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 454–55W.

Tranquillisers/Anti-depressants

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the net ingredient cost of GP prescribed *(a)* tranquillisers and *(b)* anti-depressants was (i) in total cash terms and (ii) per head of population in each primary care trust in England in 2002; and what the (A) total cost and (B) average per head cost was for England in 2002. [125629]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information has been placed in the Library which shows the number of prescription items, the net ingredient cost and the net ingredient cost per 1,000 people, of all hypnotic and anxiolytic drugs, and anti-depressant drugs, prescribed in general practitioner practices in England and dispensed in the community in 2002, by primary care trust. Information on total cash and total cost figures are not available and have been substituted with net ingredient costs.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is available to the health service on the treatment of multi-drug resistant tuberculosis; and what monitoring systems are in place to ensure compliance with such guidance. [120080]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Interdepartmental Working Group on Tuberculosis publication entitled "The Prevention and Control of Tuberculosis in the United Kingdom": UK Guidance on the Prevention and Control of Transmission of

1. HIV-related tuberculosis
2. drug resistant tuberculosis (1998)

provides information for the National Health Service on drug resistant and multi-drug resistant (MDR) tuberculosis (TB) and process of notification.

All forms of TB are compulsorily notifiable by the physician making or suspecting the diagnosis under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984.

In addition, the Public Health Laboratory Service streamlined and improved its diagnostic services for TB, strengthened surveillance and monitoring of drug resistant TB, and, following the last of a series of five-yearly detailed surveys of notifications in 1998, introduced continuous enhanced surveillance in January 1999. From 2002, this enhanced surveillance has included monitoring of the outcome of treatment.

Victoria Climbié

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry; how long it lasted; and how many days it sat in public. [124335]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

The total expenditure of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry, from its establishment on 20 April 2001 to its report being presented to the Government on 6 January 2003, was £3.8 million.

Other details relating to the Inquiry can be obtained from the Victoria Climbié Inquiry website, www.victoriaclimbie.org.uk.

Waiting Lists/Times

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the mid-Essex Hospital Trust area are waiting for in-patient treatment. [124998]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* There were 8,710 patients waiting for inpatient treatment at Mid Essex Hospital Services National Health Service Trust at the end of May 2003.

Source:
Department of Health monthly monitoring figures.

TREASURY

Benefits Uptake

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of eligible individuals who have failed to apply for *(a)* working tax credit, *(b)* minimum income guarantee and *(c)* child tax credit within the Crosby constituency. [122205]

Dawn Primarolo: No estimates are available for the Child or Working Tax Credit, or the Minimum Income Guarantee, in each constituency.

Biodiesel Duty

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the basis for his decision on the rate by which duty on biodiesel is being reduced; what consultations he held with the fuel industry; and what reductions the industry proposed. [124400]

John Healey: I did so in my answer to the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) on 22 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 882W.

We held a number of meetings and received a number of representations about the level of duty on biodiesel.

Census

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is his policy to use the one-number census process to determine population in the future. [124747]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Mark Field, dated 14 July 2003:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking if it is policy to use the One Number Census process to determine population in the future. (124747)

In the UK, the mid-year population estimates are based on an internationally accepted and widely employed demographic method. Using this method, estimates are produced by updating from a census base allowing for births, deaths and net migration. This basic method will continue to be employed in the future. However, we are continuing with research into improving our methods of estimating the components of population change between the censuses. The 2001 census showed we need to be much better at this. In particular the Office for National Statistics published on the 9th July a study looking at the future of population statistics; this is available on the National Statistics website at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/Methodology_by_theme/Dem_Stat_Ser_21ST_Cen.asp

Further, a National Statistics Quality Review on International Migration Statistics is nearing completion and this will make recommendations on improving the accuracy of these statistics, which are the most difficult component of population change to measure accurately.

A research programme, the Census Strategic Development Programme, has been established to co-ordinate the future development of the census. This programme will explore the modifications to a traditional census, taking account of the lessons from the 2001 census and harnessing modern technologies. Other potential options are being explored including: a rolling census, covering successive sections of the population; a sample census, only ever covering a percentage of the population; producing statistics from existing person-based data held by government for administrative purposes; or some combination of these. The first phase of this research will result in recommendations in late 2003.

The One Number Census process added considerably to our knowledge of the quality of the census at a local authority level. However, in the future it will be possible to place even more emphasis on producing measures of quality. This will be a critical shift in determining future actions.

Council Tax

Mr. Breed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average proportion of income paid out in council tax by a pensioner household in the South West of England is. [124620]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Colin Breed dated 14 July 2003

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking for the average proportion of income paid out in council tax by a pensioner household in the South-West of England. (124620)

Estimates for council taxes and income are based on the analysis "The effects of taxes and benefits on household income 2001–02" produced by the ONS and published on the National Statistics website on April 11 2003 and in Economic Trends in the May 2003 edition. The analysis can be obtained from the House of Commons Library. This includes measures of income inequality for the United Kingdom as a whole based on data from the Expenditure and Food Survey.

Pensioner households have been defined as those where the Household Reference Person is retired. The Household Reference Person is defined as retired if aged 65 years or more and male, or 60 years or more and female, and economically inactive. The Household Reference Person is identified during the interview and is defined as the member of the household who:

a. owns the household accommodation, or

b. is legally responsible for the rent of the accommodation, or

c. has the household accommodation as an emolument or perquisite, or

d. has the household accommodation by virtue of some relationship to the owner who is not a member of the household.

If there are joint householders, the Household Reference Person will be the householder with the highest income. If the income is the same, then the eldest householder is taken.

The estimated net council tax paid as a percentage of gross income for pensioner households in the South-West of England is 3.6 per cent. Net council tax is derived from gross council tax less benefits and discounts.

Andrew George: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the average proportion of income paid out in council tax by a non-pensioner household in the South West of England was in 2002–03; [124674]

(2) what the average proportion of income paid out in council tax by a household in the top income decile in the South-West of England was in 2002–03. [124677]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Andrew George, dated 14 July 2003:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions asking for the average proportion of income paid out in council tax by a household in the top income decile in the

South-West of England in 2002–03 and the average proportion of income paid out in council tax by a non-pensioner households in the South-West of England in 2002–03. (124674, 124677).

Estimates for council taxes and income are based on the analysis "The effects of taxes and benefits on household income 2001–02" produced by the ONS and published on the National Statistics website on April 11th 2003 and in Economic Trends in the May 2003 edition. The analysis can be obtained from the House of Commons Library. This includes measures of income inequality for the United Kingdom as a whole based on data from the Expenditure and Food Survey (EFS).

Sample sizes for all households in the South-West are only sufficient to allow a breakdown to be given by quintiles of income distribution and not by decile. The latest analysis from which estimates can be provided is for 2001–02 and results for 2002–03 will not be available until 2004.

Non-pensioner households have been defined as those where the Household Reference Person is not retired. The Household Reference Person is defined as retired if 65 years or more and male, or 60 years of age or more and female, and economically inactive. The Household Reference Person is identified during the interview and is defined as the member of the household who:

a. owns household accommodation, or

b. is legally responsible for the rent of the accommodation, or

c. has the household accommodation as an emolument or perquisite, or

d. has the household accommodation by virtue of some relationship to the owner who is not a member of the household.

If there are joint householders, the Household Reference Person will be the householder with the highest income. If the income is the same, then the eldest householder is taken.

The following table shows: the estimated net council tax paid as a percentage of gross income for all households and non-pensioner households in the South-West, and the percentage paid for all households in the top income quintile (where households are ranked by equivalised disposable income).

The tope income quintile in the South-West includes all households where the equivalised disposable household income is equal to or more than £26,317 per year. Net council tax is derived from gross council tax less benefits and discounts.

Council tax paid as a percentage of gross income for all household and non-pensioner[1] households in the South-West, 2001–02
(South-West—Percentages)

	Households	*Top quintile[2]*	*All households*
Net council tax[3]	All[1]	1.5	2.5
	Non-pensioner	--	2.2

[1] Household reference person is not retired.
[2] Households with equivalised disposable household income of or above £26.317 per year.
[3] Net council taxes after deducting benefits and discounts
Source:
Office for National Statistics, based on the analysis. The effects of taxes and benefits on households income. Published on the ONS website and in Economic Trends No 594 May 2203

Defence Budget

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated total Government expenditure on military activities *(a)* was in 2002–03 and *(b)* will be in 2003–04. [125257]

Mr. Boateng: Estimated expenditure for military activities for 2002–03 and planned expenditure for 2003–04 can be found the Ministry of Defence's Government Expenditure Plans 2003–04 to 2005–06.

In particular reference to the cost of conflict prevention in 2002–03 the provisional outturn is as follows.

	£ million
Resource DEL	1,323
Annually Managed Expenditure	159
Capital DEL	332

It is not possible to provide an estimated cost of conflict prevention for 2003–04 as these rely on a number of unknown factors such as the length and amount of military activity needed in each theatre of operation.

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of tax revenues in 2003–04 will be directed to the Ministry of Defence budget; and what proportion is allocated to *(a)* conflict resolution and *(b)* peace-keeping. [125378]

Mr. Boateng: The Government do not specifically allocate funds to Departments based on percentage of tax revenues but through the Government Spending Review and the supply estimate process. Budget 2003, table C12, sets out allocations of £30.8 billion resource and £ 6.1 billion capital for the Ministry of Defence budget in 2003–04.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Horam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of the Department's policies have been screened for their environmental impact since June 2001; how many environmental appraisals have been conducted, and on what policy issues; and what information has been published about these screenings and appraisals. [124709]

John Healey: The Government are committed to appraising the environmental impact of Budget measures, and publishes information relating to those impacts annually, in tables 1 and 2 of Chapter 7 of the Budget Red Book.

Furthermore, for the first time in Spending Review 2002, departments with a Public Service Agreement were asked to produce Sustainable Development Reports, identifying the social, economic and environmental implications of their policy priorities. The Spending Review White Paper: Opportunity and Security for All, was the main output of SR2002.

European Economic Convergence

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he would take following a decision to implement a discretionary fiscal policy to stabilise the economy as discussed in the Treasury publication Fiscal Stabilisation and EMU, to reconcile conflicting demands of fiscal sustainability and macroeconomic stability, as described in paragraph 4.23 of the document. [121550]

Mr. Boateng: Inside or outside EMU, the Government's pre-eminent fiscal objective is to ensure sound public finances over the medium term.

In the event of EMU entry, the adoption of an explicit fiscal stabilisation objective and rule would add an element of pre-commitment and help ensure that

discretionary fiscal policy operated symmetrically over the cycle and hence it would underpin rather than threaten fiscal sustainability.

European Union

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was paid to the European Union to fund the operation of the *(a)* European Commission, *(b)* European Parliament and *(c)* European Council of Ministers in the last financial year. [124366]

Dawn Primarolo: The United Kingdom contributes to the EC budget as a whole and not to individual Community institutions. In 2002, the UK's gross contribution after abatement, as shown in Supplementary and Amending Budget No 3/2003 was 10.6 billion euro.

Firearms

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many firearms were detected by HM Customs officers in the possession of passengers disembarking from aircraft at Farnborough, Hampshire on 30 November 1999, broken down by *(a)* type of firearm, *(b)* the operator of the flight from which the passenger had alighted, *(c)* the passenger's nationality and *(d)* the action taken by HM Customs and Excise. [124953]

John Healey: The information requested is not available; Exemption 14 (Information given in confidence) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information applies to all such information.

Income Tax

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the yield from an increase in income tax on all taxable income below *(a)* £100,000 and *(b)* £50,000 of (i) 1p, (ii) 2p, (iii) 3p and (iv) 4p in (A) the current financial year and (B) 2004–05. [125275]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is given in the table.

£ billion

Increase in all rates of income tax	*Yield from increase in income tax on all taxable income*	
	(A) 2003–04	*(B) 2004–05*
(a) taxable income below £100,000		
(i) 1p	4.7	5.0
(ii) 2p	9.4	10.0
(iii) 3p	14.1	15.0
(iv) 4p	18.8	20.0
(b) taxable income below £50,000		
(i) 1p	4.4	4.7
(ii) 2p	8.8	9.4
(iii) 3p	13.2	14.1
(iv) 4p	17.6	18.8

The estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the April 2003 Budget.

All the figures shown are the estimated direct effects of tax changes on tax revenues. In practice, tax changes will themselves effect taxpayer behaviour and economic variables, which in turn will have further effects on tax revenues.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the yield from an increase in income tax on all taxable income from earnings only of *(a)* 1p, *(b)* 2p, *(c)* 3p and *(d)* 4p in (i) the current financial year and (ii) 2004–05. [125276]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is given in the table.

£ billion

Increase in starting rate, basic rate and higher rate of income tax on earnings	*Yield from increase in income tax on all taxable income from earnings*	
	(i) 2003–04	*(ii) 2004–05*
(a) 1p	4.8	5.1
(b) 2p	9.6	10.2
(c) 3p	14.4	15.3
(d) 4p	19.2	20.4

The estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the April 2003 Budget.

All the figures shown are the estimated direct effects of tax changes on tax revenues. In practice, tax changes will themselves effect taxpayer behaviour and economic variables, which in turn will have further effects on tax revenues.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the yield from an increase in income tax on all taxable income from earnings only below *(a)* £100,000 and *(b)* £50,000 of (i) 1p, (ii) 2p, (iii) 3p and (iv) 4p in (A) the current financial year and (B) 2004–05. [125277]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is given in the following table.

Increase in income tax rates on earned income	*Yield from increase in income tax rates on earned income (£ billion)*	
	(A) 2003–04	*(B) 2004–05*
(a) Total earnings below £100,000		
(i) 1p	4.4	4.7
(ii) 2p	8.8	9.4
(iii) 3p	13.2	14.1
(iv) 4p	17.6	18.8
(b) Total earnings below £50,000		
(i) 1p	4.1	4.4
(ii) 2p	8.2	8.8
(iii) 3p	12.3	13.2
(iv) 4p	16.4	17.6

The estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the April 2003 Budget.

All the figures shown are the estimated direct effects of tax changes on tax revenues. In practice, tax changes will themselves effect taxpayer behaviour and economic variables, which in turn will have further effects on tax revenues.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the yield from an increase in income tax on all taxable income of *(a)* 1p, *(b)* 2p, *(c)* 3p and *(d)* 4p in (i) the current financial year and (ii) 2004–05; [125288]

(2) if he will estimate the yield from an increase in the base rate of income tax of *(a)* 1p, *(b)* 2p, *(c)* 3p and *(d)* 4p in (i) the current financial year and (ii) 2004–05. [125289]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to table 1.6 on the Inland Revenue website www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/tax_expenditures/g_t06_1.htm.

Iraq

Mr. Syms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to set aside further funds to pay for actions involving British troops in Iraq. [125046]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor set aside a £3 billion special reserve in the Budget to cover the cost of military operations in Iraq.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was collected through stamp duty in Northern Ireland in the last financial year. [124365]

Dawn Primarolo: Stamp duty receipts processed by the Belfast stamp office, the only stamp office in Northern Ireland, amounted to £55 million in 2002–03. However this does not reflect the total amount of stamp duty (including Stamp Duty Reserve Tax ("SDRT")) paid by residents of Northern Ireland. SDRT on share transactions is collected via the CREST electronic settlement system and information on the geographical location of the underlying share transaction is not maintained.

Departmental Policies

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what policies *(a)* initiated and *(b)* managed by his Department since 2001 have had an impact on Pendle; and if he will make a statement. [124088]

Mr. Boateng: In common with all constituencies in the UK, Pendle has benefited from the stability created by this Government's new macroeconomic frameworks and reforms of productivity and labour market opportunities. This has, for example, resulted in a 23 per cent. fall in Pendle's claimant count unemployment, and an 88 per cent. fall in its long-term claimant unemployment, since April 1997.

As at November 2002, 3,428 families in Pendle were receiving the working families tax credit and 75 disabled people were in receipt of the disabled person's tax credit (now both replaced by the working tax credit and the child tax credit).

In addition, in 2003–04 Pendle shire district council received a 12½ per cent. increase in formula grant from central Government, while the North West Development Agency's indicative allocation increased by 5.4 per cent. between 2002–03 and 2003–04.

Pendle's constituents will also benefit from the Government's public services reforms and the £61 billion increase in spending on public services over the next three years which was announced in Spending Review 2002.

Pensions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his further plans for tax treatment of pension funds. [125891]

Dawn Primarolo: On 17 December the Government published a consultation document, "Simplifying the taxation of pensions: increasing choice and flexibility". This proposed that the current eight pension tax regimes would be replaced by a single lifetime allowance on tax relieved pension savings.

The Government are currently considering the responses to the consultation and a further paper, setting out the detail of the proposed regime, will be published in the autumn.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pensionable age persons live in each constituency in the UK. [124760]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Adrian Sanders, dated 14 July 2003:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many pensionable age persons live in each constituency in the UK. (124760)

The numbers of persons of pensionable age in each parliamentary constituency in the United Kingdom is not yet available from the 2001 Census, although the figures are available for every local authority in England and Wales in Table KS02 of the Census 2001 Key Statistics for local authorities in England and Wales published on 13 February. A copy of this report was placed in the House of Commons Library and is available on the ONS website at http://nswebcopy/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk = 10150

The same table will be available for UK Parliamentary Constituencies. It is planned to release this in August or September and a copy will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

In addition a printed volume will provide a brief statistical summary of each current UK Parliamentary constituency, including some comparative measures. Electronic supplements will in addition provide Key Statistics and Census Area Statistics, and reference maps for each constituency. It is the intention to issue a further report based on any new constituency boundaries adopted for the next General Election.

Information from the Censuses in Scotland and Northern Ireland is available from the Registrars General for Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was produced from direct taxation on pensions in the past five years. [125141]

Dawn Primarolo: Available estimates of the amount of income tax paid on private pensions from 1997–98 to 2001–02 are contained in table T7.9 of Inland Revenue Statistics. The latest version is on the Inland Revenue website: http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.Uk/stats/pensions/p_t09_1_.htm.

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research he has commissioned on professional indemnity insurance cover; and if he will make a statement. [125713]

Mr. Boateng: The Financial Services Authority has undertaken its own research and is aware of independent research by the Association of Independent Financial Advisers into the market for professional indemnity insurance (PII) for independent financial advisers. That research informs their work to develop policy in this area, including their forthcoming further consultation on PII.

Suicides

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths in England have been recorded as suicides in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [124875]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Alan Hurst, dated 14 July 2003:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning how many deaths in England have been recorded as suicide in each year since 1990. (124875)

The most recent available suicide data are for the calendar year 2001. Figures for each year from 1990 to 2001 are given in the table below.

Number of deaths from suicide and injury undetermined whether accidentally or purposely[1], inflicted, England[2], 1990 to 2001[3]

	Number of deaths
1990	5,209
1991	5,128
1992	5,115
1993	4,929
1994	4,780
1995	4,816
1996	4,572
1997	4,662
1998	4,815
1999	4,828
2000	4,598
2001	4,388

[1] The cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) codes E950-E959 and E980-E989 excluding E988.8for the years 1990 to 2000, and, for the year 2001, the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes X60-X84 and Y10-Y34 excluding Y33.9 where the Coroner's verdict was pending.

[2] Figures are for residents of England.

[3] Figures are for deaths registered in 1990 to 1992 and for deaths occurring in each calendar year from 1993 to 2001.

Tax Credits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new child tax credit claims have been *(a)* refused and *(b)* investigated as potentially fraudulent. [121217]

Dawn Primarolo: The numbers of inquiries into tax credit awards under Section 19 of the Tax Credits Act 2002, of penalties imposed and of prosecutions and convictions for offences connected with tax credits will be published in the annual report required under Section 40 of the Act.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases of tax credit fraud have been detected in each of the last six years; and how many resulted in successful prosecution. [124506]

Dawn Primarolo: The Revenue tackle fraud, error and avoidance using civil investigation and settlement, and applying financial penalties where appropriate. Cases of suspected serious fraud are referred to the Revenue's Special Compliance Office, for civil investigation or prosecution as appropriate. The numbers of civil investigations of serious fraud completed by the SCO are:

	Serious fraud cases settled
2001–02	308
2000–01	310
1999–2000	361
1998–99	315
1997–98	375
1996–97	394

Details of prosecutions by the Revenue are published in their Annual Reports, copies of which are available in the House Library.

Customs' policy in tackling VAT fraud is to use cost effective civil Procedures wherever possible. Investigation with a view to criminal prosecution is reserved for only the more serious or aggravated cases. The number of VAT fraud cases finalised by the imposition of a civil evasion penalty are:

	Number of civil evasion penalties imposed
1996–97	849
1997–98	898
1998–99	902
1999–2000	860
2000–01	729
2001–02	346

Figures for 2002–03 will be published in Customs' Annual Report. The number of VAT fraud prosecutions is:

	Completed prosecutions	Successful prosecutions
1996–97	99	90
1997–98	70	65
1998–99	69	61
1999–2000	94	73
2000–01	37	25

2001–02—89 cases reported for prosecution.

Figures for the cases reported for prosecution in 2002–03 will be published in Customs' Annual Report.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people who are eligible for each of the available tax credits have yet to apply; and how many *(a)* applications have been received from and *(b)* eligible applicants there are in (i) the Teesside region and (ii) the Middlesbrough, South and East, Cleveland constituency. [122225]

Dawn Primarolo: Six million families are expected to benefit from the Child Tax Credit (CTC) or Working Tax Credit (WTC). I told the House on 7 July that claims had already been received from over 4.5 million families, that 4.25 million families were already in award and that 1.3 million were receiving equivalent support for their children through Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance. Since then, tax credit claims have continued to arrive.

No estimates are available of the number of individuals eligible for the Child or Working Tax Credit in each constituency. Statistics on awards of these tax credits will be published from August.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many applications for *(a)* child tax credit and *(b)* working tax credit have (i) been received (ii) are in payment and (iii) are waiting to be processed. [122697]

Hywel Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the number of outstanding claims for *(a)* working tax credit and *(b)* child tax credit for (i) Wales and (ii) the UK; and how many of these were submitted before 4 April. [123847]

John Thurso: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many applications for *(a)* child tax credit and *(b)* working tax credit (i) have been received, (ii) are in payment and (iii) are waiting to be processed, broken down by region. [124529]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 7 July 2003]*: I refer the hon. Members to my statement to the House on 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 859.

Claims for Child and Working Tax Credits are made and processed together. No breakdown of the figures in my statement is available below the United Kingdom level. Statistics on awards of these tax credits will be published from August.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints his Department has received relating to *(a)* child tax credit and *(b)* working tax credit. [122698]

John Thurso: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints his Department has received relating to *(a)* child tax credit and *(b)* working tax credit, broken down by region. [124530]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is not available.

John Thurso: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people who were receiving working families tax credit in March 2003 *(a)* received payments of child tax credit by the end of April and *(b)* had not received their child tax credit by the end of April, broken down by region. [125431]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to my statement to the House on 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 859.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many former recipients of the working families tax credit have been transferred to the *(a)* working tax credit and *(b)* child tax credit; how many new applications for (i) child tax credit and (ii) working tax credit (A) have been received and (B) are in payment. [125631]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to my statement to the House on 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 859, and to my answer to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on 3 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 379–80W. Claims for child and working tax credits are made and processed together. Statistics on awards of these tax credits will be published from August.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many planning applications have been made to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department. [124816]

John Healey: None have been received by the Treasury, Inland Revenue or HM Customs and Excise.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 15 July 2003

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Connexions

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the performance of the Connexions service as a universal advice service for all young people. [123693]

Margaret Hodge: There are now 47 Connexions partnerships in operation covering all of England. 31 started during the financial year 2002–03. The last one started in April 2003. Ofsted have reported full inspections of six partnerships so far and initial indications are that Connexions partnerships are making progress at different rates with implementation of services. Performance was assessed as good in four of the partnerships, while the other two were rated as less effective. There is now a substantial programme of work developing performance in these two partnerships to address the concerns expressed by Ofsted.

Among the findings from an independent survey of 16,000 young people who had been in contact with Connexion services were the following:

91 per cent. said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the service;

90 per cent. agreed that "Connexions has a lot to offer young people";

86 per cent. felt that "Connexions helps me see all the options available to me";

68 per cent. said Connexions had helped them make life-changing decisions;

47 per cent. said that contact with Connexions had made them more confident;

irrespective of the topic discussed, respondents were positive about the usefulness of the advice given—for example, 85 per cent. thought the advice on housing either very useful or useful.

Connexions provides more than just advice on careers, jobs and training, with 21 per cent. of young people receiving advice on money and benefits, 11 per cent. on stress, 10 per cent. on alcohol and drugs, 7 per cent. on bullying and 7 per cent. on sexual health matters.

Departmental Policies (Pendle)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what policies *(a)* initiated and *(b)* managed by his Department since 2001 have had an impact on Pendle; and if he will make a statement. [124096]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Outlined are details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on the Pendle constituency and Lancashire LEA.

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)—East Lancashire Transport Pilot

This is a pilot EMA area operating the transport variation. Young People receive a free travel pass to their place of learning. They can also receive up to three £50 bonuses a year plus a £50 achievement bonus at the end of their studies.

Schools in Special Measures

There is one school in Nelson—Maries Hill Pupil Referral Unit—which has been in special measures since February 2003.

Extended School Pathfinder

Lancashire is one of 25 LEAs that has received £200,000 in 2002–03 to run an extended school pathfinder (made available through the Standards Fund). An additional £25,000 was allocated to each of the pathfinders specifically for childcare provision. Overall the aim of the pathfinders has been to test out various approaches used by schools and authorities in the development of family and community facilities and services on school premises.

The Lancashire pathfinder has built upon existing and emerging developments in community use of maintained schools in the County. The project has focused primarily on five specific areas in the county where serious issues of social unrest, lack of community cohesion, significant levels of deprivation and poor health have already been identified. One of the five areas is Pendle, where six schools have been involved (listed as follows)

The six Pendle schools are:

Nelson Walton High School

West Craven High School

Nelson Edge End High School

Colne Saints John Fisher and Thomas Moore High School

Brierfield Mansfield High School

Nelson Marsden Early Excellence Centre

Connexions

Connexions is the Government's front line support service for all young people in England aged 13–19. It is a universal service, offering integrated information, advice and guidance and access to personal development opportunities, to help remove barriers to learning and progression and ensure young people make a smooth transition to adulthood and working life. The headline aim is to reduce the number of young people aged 16–18 years who are not in education, employment or training.

Connexions Lancashire went live in April 2002. Its budgets were:

	£
2002–03	12,132,753
2003–04	12,666,525

Note:

A breakdown for Pendle itself cannot be obtained without disproportionate cost.

School Achievement Awards

The following schools in Pendle have received School Achievement Awards since 2001:

Round one awards announced March 2001

Barnoldswick Church of England Controlled Primary School
Barrowford School
Colne Gibfield School
Colne Lord Street School
Holy Saviour Roman Catholic Primary School, Nelson
Kelbrook Primary School
Brierfield Mansfield High School
McMillan Nursery School
Nelson Bradley Primary School
Nelson St. Paul's Church of England Primary School
Nelson St. Philip's Church of England Primary School
Nelson Whitefield Infant School and Nursery Unit
Salterforth Primary School
St. John Fisher and Thomas More Roman Catholic High School, Colne
St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Barnoldswick
Trawden Forest Primary School

Round two awards announced March 2002

Barnoldswick Church of England Controlled Primary School
Barrowford St Thomas Church of England Primary School
Bradley Nursery School
Laneshaw Bridge Primary School
Marsden Community Primary School
McMillan Nursery School
Nelson Whitefield Infant School and Nursery Unit
Newjown Nursery School
Park Primary School
Reedley Primary School
Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Primary School, Colne
Salterforth Primary School
St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Barnoldswick
Walton Lane Nursery School
West Street Primary School

Round three awards announced May 2003

Bradley Nursery School
Walton Lane Nursery School
Newtown Nursery School
McMillan Nursery School
Barrowford School
Blacko Primary School
West Street Community Primary School
Bradley Primary School
Walverden Primary School
Nelson Whitefield Infant School and Nursery Unit
Kelbrook Primary School
Colne Christ Church Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Nelson St. Philip's Church of England Primary School
St. John Southworth Roman Catholic Primary School, Nelson
Wheatley Lane Methodist Voluntary Aided Primary School
West Craven High Technology College
Nelson Edge End High School

Capital Allocations (£000) for Lancashire LEA:

Lancashire LEA have not bid for any capital funding for Pendle through any of the bidding rounds since 2001. The only funding going specifically to schools in Pendle (through Lancashire LEA) is devolved formula capital which started in 2000–01. The amount of devolved going to Pendle would only be known by the LEA.

Since 1999 the LEA has received the following capital allocations:

£000

	Capital allocation
1999–2000	3,5179
2000–01	38,021
2001–02	29,778
2002–03	44,303
2003–04	62,607

School Attendance

Lancashire is one of the Authorities that have been funded through the £11.25 million Capital Modernisation Funding project to provide funding for electronic registration systems in secondary schools with high levels of unauthorised absence which was initiated by the Department in 2001–02. Lancashire has received £444,340 towards setting up electronic registration in 23 secondary schools including two schools (Walton High School and West Craven High School) in the Pendle constituency receiving a total of £38,570. Independent evaluation has shown that, used effectively, electronic registration can significantly reduce levels of truancy within the first two years of implementation.

Lancashire has also participated in the nationally co-ordinated truancy sweeps, for example in December 178 truants were found. Lancashire also conducts a termly programme of truancy sweeps. Truancy sweeps have not only been found useful in returning truanting children back to school and publicising the importance of school attendance, but also through them children who have been missing from the school system altogether have been identified.

Exclusions

Pendle district has two Pupil Referral Units: Maries Hill PRU (40 places), and Pendle PRU (24 places). The LEA has a well structured Pupil Referral Service with clear policies and procedures for admissions and exit.

On reintegration of teenage parents into education

Lancashire has received funding from the DfES Standards Fund since 2000 to help reduce the levels of conception for under 18 by half by 2010—and the social exclusion of teenage parents within the Authority. Details of funding are as follows:

	£
2000–01	137,400
2001–02	137,400
2002–03	163,847

Lancashire has recruited five part time Learning Mentors to complement the work of the re-integration officer. For example, altogether they dealt with over 140

secondary educational bases. 62 young girls and four young men were referred to the re-integration officer in the 2001–02 financial year.

Beacon Schools

There are currently two beacon schools in the Pendle constituency—they are Laneshaw Bridge Primary School and Walton Lane Nursery School. Laneshaw Bridge became a beacon school in September 2000 and has just has its beacon status renewed for a further year until September 2004. Walton Lane Nursery School became a beacon school in September 2001 and its beacon status also ends in September 2004.

Newchurch in Pendle St. Mary's CE Primary School ceased to be a beacon school in September 2002.

Pathfinder Young Community Champions Fund (PYCCF) Funding

£45,000 shared between four Boroughs (February 2003 – September 2004).

Note:

Pendle forms part of the Lancashire Partnership pathfinder community cohesion area (consisting of Lancashire county council, Burnley borough council, Hyndburn borough council, Pendle borough council and Rossendale borough council). The area will receive £45,000 to implement the PYCCF between February 2003 to September 2004.

Higher Education (Elmet)

Colin Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils from the four high schools in the Elmet constituency progressed into higher education in each year since 1995. [123515]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 8 July 2003]:* The numbers of students from the four high schools in Elmet accepted for entry through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) to full-time undergraduate courses in the UK is given as follows:

Applicants accepted through UCAS to full-time higher education from the four high schools[1] in Elmet constituency

Year of Entry	*Number*
1995	226
1996	231
1997	249
1998	226
1999	254
2000	257
2001	239
2002	261

[1] Includes Boston Spa Comprehensive School, Brigshaw High School, Garforth Community College and Wetherby High School

Source:

UCAS

Modern Languages

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will reply to the Question from the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton of 30th April on the estimated number of entrants aged under 21 to modern languages courses at higher education institutions from 2003 to 2008.' [121801]

Alan Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 9 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 800W.

Students (Home Towns)

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the change in the proportion of students attending university in their home towns over the last five years. [110997]

Alan Johnson: The Department does not hold information on students studying in their home towns. However, several research projects have looked at the influences on choice of institution. Comparisons from the Student Income and Expenditure Survey (SIES) in 1995–96 and 1998–99 show that there has been a slight increase of around 5 per cent. in the overall proportion of students living with their parents, especially among first years. Among the students surveyed in 1998–99, 18 per cent. lived with their parents.

A student living survey carried out by UNITE/MORI in 2003 revealed that the ability to live at home during term time was a factor influencing the choice of university by 35 per cent. of those in the lower social classes compared with 26 per cent. of semi-skilled non-manual workers and 13 per cent. of those in professional and managerial social classes.

A study completed by the Institute of Employment Studies found that the priority when choosing an institution is for the right subject of study and course, however non-traditional applicants, particularly mature applicants and ethnic minorities gave more emphasis to reputation and quality, location and nearness to 'home'.

Universities

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his policy is on the diversity of academic courses and research at universities in the UK. [125138]

Alan Johnson: Universities in the UK are independent, autonomous bodies and are responsible for deciding the range and mode of courses they offer, taking account of student demand and their institutional mission. The Higher Education Funding Council for England and its equivalent bodies in the devolved administrations allocate research funding selectively to universities according to the quality and volume of their research activity.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures he is taking to promote the teaching and research of specialist and emergency subjects at universities in the UK. [125140]

Alan Johnson: The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) allocates teaching funding to higher education institutions (HEIs) in England through a formula relating to the number of students and the types of courses they are taking. The HEFCE has also allocated special funding for 'minority subjects' which it deems to be in national interest but which might otherwise be at risk because of the small number of students taking them.

Research funding is allocated to HEIs according to their success in the Research Assessment Exercise. In addition to the main allocations, the HEFCE provides

research capability funding to emerging subjects where the research base is not as strong as in more established subjects.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agricultural Consultants

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research she has undertaken of the impact of the Department and Business Link on agricultural consultants in the private sector. [125399]

Alun Michael: None.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the British Institute of Agricultural Consultants about the work of the Department and Business Link. [125400]

Alun Michael: I attended the Institute's annual lunch last year. I accepted a subsequent offer to me from the Chief Executive of the British Institute of Agricultural Consultants to assist with our work in developing a business support framework for rural areas and Defra officials are discussing this further with the Institute on my behalf.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her Department has spent in each of the past five years supporting the work of *(a)* Business Link and *(b)* the Farm Business Advice Service; and how many farmers have been advised in the past five years by the Department and Business Link. [125403]

Alun Michael: The following table sets out expenditure and delivery figures for the Farm Business Advice Service since it began in October 2000.

	Number of requests	*Number of initial visits*	*Number of action plans*	*Expenditure (£ million)*
2000–01	4,120	885	6,352	4.1
2001–02	2,393	2,214	2,101	6.85
2002–03	4,067	3,237	3,058	6.76
2003–04[1]	1,085	604	339	0.1
Total	11,665	6,940	11,850	17.81

[1] First two months of delivery

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the procedures for the screening of applicants to become Business Link advisers with the Farm Business Advice Service. [125432]

Alun Michael: The Farm Business Advice Service is managed by the Small Business Service (an agency of the DTI) and delivered through a network of Business Link advisers. The Service has adopted the Standards of Professional Competence for Business Link Advisory and Information Services. The Small Business Service intends to enhance the Standards of Professional Competence during 2003–04. Defra's Learning, Skills and Knowledge Programme involves a review of the accreditation requirements for publicly funded advisers, following a recommendation by the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* individuals and *(b)* firms are registered as Business Link advisers with the Farm Business Advice Service. [125433]

Alun Michael: Across England a total of 522 advisers are contracted to deliver the Farm Business Advice Service. Of these, 43 are contracted directly to a Business Link, 79 are self-employed and 387 are sub-contracted and some of these are employed by agricultural consultancies. The recruitment of advisers is managed directly by Business Link organisations.

Bovine TB

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cattle were slaughtered because of bovine TB in each year since 1997 in *(a)* West Derbyshire and *(b)* Derbyshire. [124011]

Mr. Bradshaw: The number of cattle slaughtered under bovine TB measures in Derbyshire, from 1997 to 2002, is given in the table. The data requested are not available for the parliamentary constituency of West Derbyshire. However, as a guideline, approximately 90 per cent. of confirmed TB breakdowns over the period have occurred in the western part of the county.

Cattle slaughtered in Derbyshire under bovine TB control measures 1997–20021

	Number
1997	61
1998	57
1999	255
2000	59
2001	45
2002	370

[1] TB Reactors plus direct contacts

Note:

In 2001, the TB testing and control programme was largely suspended due to the Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreak. Since testing resumed in 2002, resources have been concentrated on herds with overdue TB tests which would have had a longer period in which to contract the disease. Also the proportion of high risk herds being tested post-FMD is greater than that prior to the outbreak. As a result, the number of TB reactors identified and slaughtered in 2002 is not comparable to those identified and slaughtered in previous years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will update the statistics on her Department's bovine TB website and reconcile them to the data on the incidence of TB collected by the British Cattle Veterinary Association. [124315]

Mr. Bradshaw: Each month Defra publishes provisional cumulative TB statistics for the calendar year on its website, including the number of TB tests carried out, the number of new TB incidents and the number of animals slaughtered in each State Veterinary Service region (SVS).

There is a delay of approximately six weeks before the data appear, to allow sufficient time for data to be returned to the SVS and entered on the Department's computer system. The data are subject to revision over

a period of several months as additional data are entered. The most recent statistics on the website are for January to April 2003.

National statistics notices are also published on the Defra TB website each month. They are produced after a time lag of approximately three months, and therefore give a more complete and accurate picture than Defra's GB statistics.

We have no plans at the present time to reconcile our data with the data collected by the British Cattle Veterinary Association.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the collection of data on the TB 99 epidemiological survey. [124317]

Mr. Bradshaw: At 24 June 2003, a total of 703 TB99 case reports and 354 control reports had been entered on to the TB99 database for the badger culling trial areas. Defra is working hard to increase the number of reports e.g. by contracting ADAS Ltd. to assist the State Veterinary Service to complete TB99s. The Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB has advised that it expects to have sufficient data to complete an initial analysis by the end of 2003.

Carbon Sinks

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether wood used in wood products is assessed by her Department as a carbon sink; what research has been undertaken into the use of carbon sinks as an environmental measure; and if she will make a statement. [125117]

Mr. Morley: The UK Greenhouse Gas Inventory submitted annually to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UN-FCCC) includes an allowance for carbon in wood products produced from timber harvested in the UK. This estimate is provided as part of the research sponsored by Government and the devolved Administrations on the use of sinks in helping to stabilise greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The scientific evidence from this research, and that carried out in other countries, underpins UK policies and international agreements on the importance of protecting and enhancing carbon sinks as required by the UN-FCCC and the Kyoto Protocol.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what changes the Agreement on CAP Reform agreed on 26 June will have on Britain's *(a)* gross and *(b)* net contribution to the EU Budget. [124350]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 8 July 2003]:* The Government's latest forecast of the trend in the UK's net contribution to the EC Budget for the period 2003–04 to 2005–06 were included in a footnote to Table C11 of the 2003 Budget Report (HC 500). These figures were also shown in Table 3.3 of the 2003 Annual White Paper "European Community Finances (Cm 5800). Revised forecasts will be included in the pre-Budget Report and will take account of all of the latest factors, including those on CAP reform.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of how much of the budget for the planned reform of the Common Agricultural Policy contributes to *(a)* trade distorting and *(b)* non-trade distorting initiatives. [123961]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not yet possible to make an accurate forecast of how the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) budget will be allocated between trade distorting and non-trade distorting measures since member states have discretion in implementing the various optional arrangements included in the reform agreement. Moreover decisions remain to be taken on reforms of the sugar, cotton, tobacco and olive oil regimes. However, the Government's initial estimates indicate that the EU is now close to meeting WTO demands for a 60 per cent. reduction in amber box subsidies and can fully meet the WTO proposal for a 50 per cent. reduction in blue box payments.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of how reform of the Common Agricultural Policy will affect agricultural producers in the developing world. [123962]

Mr. Bradshaw: The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy should provide direct and indirect benefits to agricultural producers in the developing world. First, the decoupling of subsidy payments from production, together with reductions agreed in some market support arrangements, will reduce EU over-production and subsidised exports of surpluses onto world markets at prices which undermine developing country markets and economies. Secondly, the impetus which these reforms should give to a successful Doha trade round will help to bring about wider development gains, not least through global action on agricultural subsidies.

The EU Commission will also bring forward proposals during the next few months for reform of the sugar, oil, tobacco, cotton and olive oil regimes, all of which are of importance to developing world producers.

Dioxin Emissions

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the level of dioxin emissions from the cement industry was *(a)* in 1997 and *(b)* in 2001; what assessment (i) her Department and (ii) the Environment Agency has conducted of the reasons for changes in the level of emissions; and if she will make a statement on the safety of these emissions. [122758]

Mr. Bradshaw: The National Air Emission Inventory ('NAEI') estimated emissions of dioxins produced by cement kilns as 2.829 and 5.684 grams in 1997 and 2001 respectively.

Measurements of dioxins are subject to an uncertainty of up to 100 per cent. because of the complex nature of the sampling and analysis techniques and the very low levels of emissions being monitored. The amount of cement production is not the same every year and this will also affect the figures for dioxins. As a result the numerical difference may have no statistical

significance. The Environment Agency is at present investigating better techniques for dioxin analysis to secure more accurate reporting of dioxins data.

The Environment Agency has recently taken regulatory action to decrease dioxin levels, in particular at a single cement kiln site where a reduction from 2.2 grams in 2001 to 0.3 grams in 2002 is anticipated. The Environment Agency's own provisional estimate for 2002 is 1.5 grams of dioxins.

European and domestic environmental regulations require that emissions limits for dioxins are set for cement production activities. The limits will reflect the benchmark values suggested by the European Commission and technical guidance produced by the Environment Agency. While excessive exposure to dioxins may be detrimental to human health, the Environment Agency aims to ensure that environmental exposures are too low for this to occur.

Energy Conservation

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received following the annual report on the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000. [118987]

Mr. Bradshaw: Representation on the report has been received from the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group (FPAG).

European Councils

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 11 to 13 June; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [119888]

Margaret Beckett: I refer my hon. Friend to my statement on CAP Reform on 26 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 7220.

Fats and Proteins (UK) Ltd.

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will make a decision on the appeal of Fats and Proteins (UK) Ltd. which was heard in 1998. [124999]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* The Secretary of State's decision has been made and a letter dated 7 July 2003 has been sent to the appellant. Copies of the letter have been sent to all interested parties.

GM Crops

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which regions of the UK are involved in GM field trials; and how many sites for GM field trials there are in the UK. [125956]

Mr. Morley: The following table shows the location, by county or region, of the 38 field trials of GM crops that are currently in progress in the UK. This number includes 18 sites which are part of the remaining farm scale evaluation trials, and 15 sites where statutory trials of seeds for UK National List purposes are taking place. Numbers in brackets indicate that there is more than one trial site in a particular county.

Field trials of GM crops currently in progress

Farm scale evaluation sites	*National seeds list trial sites*	*Other GM crop research sites*
Aberdeenshire	Aberdeenshire	Cambridgeshire
Cheshire	Cambridgeshire (2)	Hertfordshire (2)
Dorset	Herefordshire	Norfolk (2)
Durham	Hertfordshire	
East Riding of Yorkshire (4)	Lincolnshire	
Fife	Norfolk (4)	
Hertfordshire	North Yorkshire (2)	
Kent	Nottinghamshire	
Lincolnshire (2)	Oxfordshire	
Norfolk	Worcestershire	
Oxfordshire		
Shropshire		
Tyne and Wear		
Warwickshire		

Littering

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many fixed penalty notices were issued for littering in England and Wales in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [124940]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* In England for the period 2001–02, 11,500 fixed penalty notices were issued for littering. The figures for 2002–03 are not yet available.

Data collection on litter fixed penalty notices in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly. I understand that centrally held data are currently not available for Wales, although it is intended that the Assembly Government will start collating data on enforcement action for littering offences by local authorities.

Nitrogen Dioxide Limits

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of people living in areas surrounding Heathrow airport where nitrogen dioxide levels exceed EU limits; and what estimate her Department has made of the number of such people in 2010. [122157]

Mr. Bradshaw: From our national air quality modelling, current forecasts suggest that we are unlikely to achieve the mandatory EU limit value for nitrogen dioxide set for 2010 around Heathrow. However, we do not have estimates for the number of people exposed to nitrogen dioxide levels in excess of the EU limit value at any airports at that point.

The Future Development of Air Transport in the UK: South East consultation document (DfT, February 2003) showed predicted exceedences of the nitrogen dioxide objective for Heathrow based on. modelling carried out as part of the Government's SERAS study. That modelling predicts that there would be 35,000 people exposed in 2015 if a third runway were to be built, falling to 33,000 in 2030. If no new airport were to be built, 14,000 people are predicted to be exposed to an exceedence of the nitrogen dioxide objective. Further modelling for SERAS, which is also reported in the

consultation document, based on a more optimistic view of improvements in engine technology and assuming positive action by the aviation industry to reduce emissions indicated that the figure of 35,000 in 2015 might fall to 5,000.

OSPAR Meeting

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the outcome of the recent OSPAR meeting in Germany; and what the implications are of decisions taken for Sellafield. [123667]

Mr. Morley: I made a written statement on 9 July about the outcome of the OSPAR meeting.

The meeting agreed that the years 1995–2001 would be used to calculate the baselines against which progress in achieving the objectives of the 1998 strategy would be measured. The Ministerial statement agreed at the meeting included the following passage:

"We note the concerns expressed by a number of Contracting Parties about discharges of technetium-99 from Sellafield and their view that these discharges should cease immediately. We welcome the recent initiative of the United Kingdom to request the operator of Sellafield to stop discharges from the MAC treatment process for the next nine months while further research and development of abatement technology is carried out. We look forward to the introduction of such technology to treat remaining MAC if it proves to be technically feasible."

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to the Chairman of BNFL shortly before the OSPAR meeting. Careful consideration will be given to BNFL's full response when it is received, and to any other representations the Department receives on this issue before any further decisions are taken on the future regulation of technetium-99 discharges from Sellafield.

Recycling

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to promote plastic recycling. [124491]

Mr. Morley: The Government have set targets and provided funding for local authorities to ensure they increase their recycling capacity. It is for the local authority to decide which materials to collect.

The Packaging Regulations contain material specific targets, including plastics. The quantity of plastic packaging which is recycled should increase as a result of current negotiations to revise the EU Directive on packaging.

The Government have also established the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) a not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee with the aim of promoting sustainable waste management by creating stable and efficient markets for recycled materials and products, including plastics.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to ensure that local authorities implement and promote doorstep recycling strategies. [124492]

Mr. Morley: The Government have set statutory performance standards (targets) requiring all local authorities to double their recycling, compared with 1999–2000, by 2003–04 and to trebling their recycling by 2005–06. We have not specified how these targets should be met, however we would expect doorstep collection to play an increasing role in meeting the targets.

The Government have supported the general principle of the Household Waste Recycling Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock). The Bill addresses the issue of doorstep collection. It provides that where English waste collection authorities have a duty to collect waste they shall ensure, except in some circumstances, that by the end of 2010 they collect at least two recyclates separate from the remainder of the waste.

The Government have also provided local authorities with substantial financial support to enable them to increase their recycling operations. Spending Review 2002 increased provision in the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services block (which includes waste) by £671 million over the three years to 2005–06. We have also provided additional funding of £140 million for 2002–03 and 2003–04 through the ring-fenced Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's progress in allowing the introduction of home-based waste separation for recycling within the five-year timetable set by the EU. [124437]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 July 2003]*: Under the revision of the Packaging Waste Directive, the European Parliament recently voted for increased recovery and recycling targets for packaging waste to be met by 2008. The Directive does not specify the method by which these targets should be met. To meet the increased targets greater quantities of packaging waste will have to be collected from the household waste stream. We would expect to see industry working together with compliance schemes and local authorities to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is in place to meet these targets.

Separately, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) has introduced the Household Waste Recycling Bill which addresses the issue of doorstep collection. The Government support the general principle of the Bill and it has now completed Committee stage in the Commons. The Bill provides that where English waste collection authorities have a duty to collect waste they shall ensure, except in some circumstances, that by the end of 2010 they collect at least two recyclates separate from the remainder of the waste.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what budget has been set aside for the next five years to promote *(a)* recycling and *(b)* waste separation in homes. [124438]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 July 2003]*: The Strategy Unit Report 'Waste Not Want Not' recommended that the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) take forward a programme of public education and awareness, which will include recycling and waste separation. The Government have accepted this recommendation and WRAP is now in the process of drawing up the detailed programme. The

majority of the resources allocated to the programme, which will amount to £3 million in 2003–04, will support local authority education schemes.

Budgets for the programme will be £10 million and £17 million in 2004–05 and 2005–06 respectively.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what percentage of biomass suitable for renewable energy generation was sent to landfill in the UK in 2002; and what the figure was for each other EU member; [124560]

(2) what the latest calculation is that she has made of the percentage of biomass containing industrial and municipal waste suitable for renewable energy generation sent to landfill. [124561]

Mr. Morley: We have not made any detailed assessments of quantities of biomass along the lines requested.

This is because the quality of the feedstock used in processes that generate renewable energy from biomass obtained from wastes varies according to the technology employed, and these wastes can also be treated by options not involving energy recovery.

However, current estimates are that nearly 80 per cent. of biodegradable municipal waste goes to landfill.

Rodenticides

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action has been taken to assess rodenticides residue in *(a)* domestic and *(b)* non-domestic animals customarily eaten by humans and potential implications for public health. [124636]

Mr. Browne: I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety Executive has recently taken over responsibility from DEFRA for the registration and assessment of rodenticides under the Control of Pesticides Regulations. All rodenticides are assessed prior to approval been granted to ensure they do not pose an unacceptable risk to man and the wider environment.

Each approval is granted, by Ministers, subject to specific Conditions of Approval, which are legal requirements and must be followed. These conditions are recorded in the approval documents and are reflected on the product label. The label will inform the user what the product has approval for use against, how it must be used to be effective and essential risk and safety advice associated with the product. The directions for use and the precautionary phrases will give the user guidance on how to avoid exposure to domestic and non-domestic animals. When carrying out a treatment the label advice must be followed and the potential risks involved when using a product should be considered.

Following approval of a product, the Approval Holder is under an ongoing responsibility to report adverse data associated with the product to the regulatory authority. Additionally, the Pesticides Residues Committee, a sub-committee of the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides, conduct a ongoing programme of testing to assess the residue levels of pesticides in food stuffs. The Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme looks at cases where domestic and non-domestic animals have been poisoned by pesticides. Information gathered from these monitoring processes are fed back into the approvals process and, if appropriate, action can be taken against products.

Rural Transport Partnership

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much funding has been allocated *(a)* by the Countryside Agency and *(b)* from other sources for new Rural Transport Partnership projects for the financial year 2003–04; and whether these allocations vary from sums previously announced. [125857]

Alun Michael: A total of £12.3 million has been allocated by the Countryside Agency to the Rural Transport Partnership scheme in 2003–04.

The Rural Transport Partnership grant scheme is run by the Agency on behalf of Defra and provides funding to Rural Transport Partnerships to help develop local transport schemes on a match funding basis.

Transport Pollutant Emissions

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of F-gas emissions are estimated to derive from the transport sector through vehicle air-conditioning and transport refrigeration; and what plans she has to control such emissions. [125333]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* The data presented in the table are taken from a study sponsored by my Department in 1995. The study estimated that in 1995, emissions from mobile air conditioning and refrigerated transport were responsible for 0.8 per cent. of total UK fluorinated gases (F-gases) emissions. This figure was projected to rise to 12 per cent. in 2010, due to the increasing use of air conditioners in new vehicles.

Emissions in million tonnes of CO_2 equivalent

	Mobile air conditioning	*Refrigerated transport*	*Total transport*	*Total all sources*	*Percentage of UK total emission*
1995	0.13	0.01	0.14	17.5	0.8
2010	1.31	0.13	1.44	12.0	12

The Department has undertaken a follow-up study for emissions and projections of F-gases and this will be published shortly.

We expect the European Commission to publish shortly a proposal on measures to reduce emissions of F-gases.

Unsupported Crops Sector

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make an assessment of the impact of the European Commission's proposals for decoupling in the unsupported crops sector. [116486]

Margaret Beckett: Overall, the agreement reached at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 27 June is estimated to give rise to annual net economic benefits of about euro 0.6 to 0.8 billion in the UK. The agreement does not provide for direct payments to growers for land used only for non-supported crops in the reference period. However, land needed to qualify for a direct payment under the new arrangements cannot be used to grow fruit, vegetables and table potatoes, thereby removing a potential source of additional competition that the unsupported sector was concerned would arise from the Commission's proposals.

Vital Villages Programme

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether *(a)* she, *(b)* Department officials and *(c)* the Countryside Agency gave instructions to suspend payments on the Countryside Agency's Vital Villages programme from 16 April to 1 June 2003. [125855]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Agency manages the Vital Villages programme on behalf of Defra. Day to day decisions on the operation of the scheme are a matter for the Agency.

The Countryside Agency did not suspend payments under the programme but did call a temporary halt to making any new commitments while they considered how to target the programme for the remainder of the year. By May 2003 almost two thirds of the 2003–04 budget was allocated.

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether there was variation between budgeted and actual expenditure in the period from April 2002 to March 2003 in the Countryside Agency's Vital Villages programme. [125856]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Agency's Vital Villages programme budget allocation was £17.5 million in 2002–03 and the actual expenditure on grants was £17.25 million. Within the overall programme the Rural Transport Partnerships budget allocation was £8.2 million and actual expenditure was £9.9 million.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Arms Exports

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the trips made by senior Ministers, and the countries visited, where UK exports on the Military and Dual Lists were the main reason for the trip in each year since 2001. [125665]

Nigel Griffiths: I am not aware of any overseas visits by senior DTI Ministers in the years since 2001 that have had as their main theme the export of Military and Dual List goods.

The specific responsibility within this Government for the export promotion of UK military equipment lies with the Ministry of Defence (MOD), specifically the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO).

BNFL

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on the involvement of BNFL in nuclear weapons programmes. [119539]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 16 June 2003]:* BNFL's Board ensures compliance with all UK nuclear non-proliferation obligations.

In common with many other suppliers, BNFL has made an important contribution to the UK's effective and credible nuclear deterrent. Tritium continues to be supplied to the Ministry of Defence, but the production and separation of plutonium for weapons' use was stopped prior to 1995. Civil nuclear material at BNFL facilities is, like such material at other facilities in the UK, subject to Euratom Treaty safeguards and to the terms of the UK's safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Euratom.

BNFL is a third joint venture partner in a consortium that manages the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston on behalf of MOD.

Canada-EU Trade

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps are being taken towards Canada agreeing a free trade agreement with the EU; and if she will make a statement. [125081]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: At the EU-Canada Summit in Ottawa last December it was agreed that proposals for the negotiation of a Trade and Investment Enhancement Agreement would be submitted for the next Summit in Canada, in December 2003.

Departmental Grants

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money has been given by her Department *(a)* in the form of Regional Selective Assistance and *(b)* under the Enterprise Grant scheme; and how much of this has been paid to industrial projects that have subsequently failed. [124730]

Jacqui Smith: Expenditure from 1 January 1997 to date was £662.1 million for Regional Selective Assistance (RSA) in England and £28.2 million for the Enterprise Grant scheme (EG) which was introduced in January 2000.

£40.1 million and £0.2 million was paid to RSA and EG projects respectively where, to date, there has been some recovery or write-off action. Many of these projects will have involved some investment but not on the scale anticipated at the time of offer.

Departmental Policy (Burma)

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on *(a)* trade with and *(b)* investment in Burma by companies registered in the United Kingdom or their overseas subsidiaries. [125668]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) on 25 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 1042W, the British

Government do not encourage trade with or investment in Burma while the regime continues to suppress the basic human rights of its people. We offer no support for companies wishing to trade with Burma or for those who want to invest there. Representatives of British companies or their subsidiaries that inquire about the prospects, either for trade with or investment in Burma, are informed of this policy. I met the Chairman of British American Tobacco, Mr. Marlin Broughton on 2 July 2003. BAT are the only major British investor in Burma. They run a partnership with the business arm of Burma's military directorship, the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings. I asked Mr. Broughton to consider withdrawing their investment.

Electricity Generation

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the UK's generation mix for electricity *(a)* is and *(b)* was in (i) 1973, (ii) 1980, and (iii) 1990, (iv) 2000. [125583]

Mr. Timms: The percentage of gross electricity supplied by fuel is set out in the following table.

	1973	*1980*	*1990*	*2000*	*2002*
Coal	67	74	69	32	32
Oil	21	11	7	1	1
Gas	—	1	1	40	40
Nuclear	10	12	20	22	22
Renewables[1]	2	2	3	3	3
Other[2]	—	—	—	2	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100

[1] Includes hydro natural flow.
[2] Includes coke oven gas, blast furnace gas, waste products from chemical processes and generation by hydro pumped storage.
Sources:
Digest of UK Energy Statistics, UK Energy in Brief

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to ask the National Radiological Protection Board to review research on the health aspects of mobile phone masts and to report to her; and if she will make a statement. [125006]

Mr. Timms: The public health implications of mobile phone technologies in general were comprehensively assessed by the Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones (IEGMP), chaired by Sir William Stewart, in May 2000 (www.iegmp.org.uk). In respect of base stations the Group concluded that:

The balance of evidence indicates that there is no general risk to the health of people living near to base stations on the basis that exposures are expected to be small fractions of guidelines.

Measurements undertaken by the National Radiological Protection Board and the Radiocommunications Agency have confirmed that public exposures are very much lower than the international exposure guidelines and are published on the websites www.nrpb.org and www.radio.gov.uk respectively.

The IEGMP additionally recommended that the issue of possible health effects from mobile phone technology should be the subject of a further review in three years time or earlier if circumstances demand it. In responding to the recommendations in the IEGMP report, the Government asked the NRPB to undertake this further review and the Board of NRPB requested its independent Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation (AGNIR) to carry this out. It is expected that this further report will be issued towards the end of 2003. Membership of AGNIR can be found on the NRPB's website (www.nrpb.org).

Post Office

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net marginal cost to the Government is of the opening of (i) 1, (ii) 100, (iii) 1,000 and (iv) 100,000 post office card accounts. [125278]

Mr. Pond *[holding answer 11 July 2003]*: I have been asked to reply.

Our working assumption is around 3 million post office card accounts will have been opened by 2005. However, there is no cap on numbers and anyone who wants to open an account can do so. Present indications are that the final number will be significantly above three million. The precise cost at any given level of take-up is commercial in confidence to Post Office Ltd. and is not released in line with paragraph 13, part 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government information.

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which urban post offices in the North East of England *(a)* have closed in each of the last three years and *(b)* are being proposed for closure. [126063]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter that falls within the operational responsibilities of Post Office Ltd. and I have asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many Post Office Card Accounts have been *(a)* applied for and *(b)* opened in (i) Jarrow constituency, (ii) South Tyneside, (iii) the North East and (iv) the UK. [125728]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the format requested. National figures only are available.

I understand from Post Office Ltd. that by 20 June 2003, 57,000 Post Office card accounts had been opened. By that date I further understand from the Department for Work and Pensions that 430,000 customers had opted for a Post Office card account.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will provide a full reply pursuant to the holding answer she gave on 18 June 2003 regarding post offices, ref 119723. [126154]

Mr. Timms: I replied in full to the hon. Member's question on 23 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 564.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what studies she has conducted into the comparative costs and uptake of renewable energy throughout the European Union. [124819]

Mr. Timms: The take up of renewable energy in the different states of the European Union is well documented (e.g. in the statistics compiled by the International Energy Agency). In addition, the European Wind Energy Association has recently published Wind Force 12, a report which assesses the current state of the European Wind Energy Market, and its potential growth. This report is available at www.ewea.org/doc/WF12.pdf. The Department has not carried out studies into the comparative costs of renewables in the different member states.

Royal Mail

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has held with *(a)* executives of Royal Mail and *(b)* other ministerial colleagues over the decision by Royal Mail to forego the use of rail transport for the carrige of mail; what assessment she has made of the decision; and if she will make a statement. [125985]

Mr. Timms: The department meets Royal Mail on a regular basis to discuss a range of issues including progress on the transport review. That review envisaged a continuing role for rail freight. Royal Mail has, following protracted negotiations with EWS, concluded that it cannot now proceed on the basis it originally intended, for reasons of cost.

The Government regret the loss of business for rail freight but stands by its policy that Royal Mail must have the freedom it needs to operate genuinely commercially.

Shareholder Votes

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what penalties she plans to impose on companies who mislay a significant proportion of shareholders' votes. [124731]

Jacqui Smith: I have no plans to impose penalties on companies. I regard the effective operation of the shareholder voting process as an essential part of the corporate governance framework. The process involves a number of parties and I am glad to see that they are working together to analyse the process in order to make it more efficient. The Department will be monitoring developments in this area closely.

Shipyards (Assistance)

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance is available from *(a)* the Government and *(b)* its agencies for shipyards in (i) England and (ii) Scotland competing for orders to construct ships. [125562]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 14 July 2003]:* Financial support is available to help UK shipyards win new orders through my Department's Home Shipbuilding Credit Guarantee Scheme (HSCGS). The HSCGS provides soft credit finance facilities to UK resident purchasers of ships in the form of loan guarantees of up to 80 per cent. of contract value for the construction and conversion of vessels. The HSCGS is currently under appraisal, in line with the DTI's wider review of existing business support schemes.

Timber

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what requirements there are on timber merchants to identify the source of timber imported into the UK. [125152]

Nigel Griffiths: None. The Timber Trade Federation operates a code of practice and organisations like the WWF 1995 Plus Group have been set up to encourage merchants and retailers to promote business methods that are consistent with sustainable forestry practices.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry from which countries the UK imports timber; what percentage of the total timber import comes from each country; what percentage is from unidentified sources; and what steps the Government takes to ensure the timber is from sustainable sources in each country. [125153]

Nigel Griffiths: Data on the UK's imports of timber are given in the following table.

Statistics on UK imports of goods are compiled by HM Customs and Excise. The information is published on the basis of the country of consignment: which is normally the last country in which a commercial transaction takes place. Information on the country of consignment is comprehensive for countries outside the European Union (EU). Within the EU detailed information is collected from all but very small traders. Overall, small traders are estimated to account for 2–3 per cent. of the value of UK trade with the EU, or about half that for total UK trade in goods. HM Customs and Excise do not collect from importers information relating to the precise origin of the timber, ie. whether or not the timber was forested from a legal and sustainably managed source, other than the country of consignment.

Comprehensive data, by country of origin are not available. The free flow of goods within the Single European Market means that information on the country of origin is not always available when goods are first imported into another European Union country and then consigned to the UK.

The Government have shown leadership in its strong encouragement of the European Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) process. This is part of the EU's wider objective to encourage sustainable forest management and ensure that timber entering the EU is sustainably sourced. The Government are broadly supportive of the Commission's recently published FLEGT action plan and will work with other member states to ensure the Commission is able to make rapid progress.

UK imports of timber in 2002

Country	*£000*	*Percentage share*
Total Imports	1,295,351	100.00
Sweden	325,172	25.10
Latvia	205,504	15.86
Finland	193,389	14.93
USA	75,570	5.83
Russia	65,909	5.09
Canada	62,164	4.80
Estonia	52,680	4.07
Irish Republic	43,462	3.36

UK imports of timber in 2002

Country	*£000*	*Percentage share*
Germany	31,326	2.42
Malaysia	26,536	2.05
France	20,239	1.56
Netherlands	19,813	1.53
Italy	19,720	1.52
Lithuania	14,144	1.09
Norway	12,932	1.00
Cameroon	12,851	0.99
Brazil	12,575	0.97
Indonesia	10,740	0.83
Belgium	10,377	0.80
Denmark	7,937	0.61
China	7,931	0.61
Ivory Coast	7,551	0.58
Czech Republic	6,951	0.54
Ghana	6,570	0.51
Poland	5,080	0.39
Singapore	4,096	0.32
Portugal	3,726	0.29
Austria	3,000	0.23
Chile	2,955	0.23
Guyana	2,424	0.19
South Africa	2,258	0.17
Spain	1,943	0.15
Slovakia	1,528	0.12
Romania	1,520	0.12
Thailand	1,406	0.11
Australia	1,259	0.10
Congo	1,124	0.09
Honduras	1,080	0.08
Taiwan	1,074	0.08
Liberia	1,012	0.08
Burma	979	0.08
Hong Kong	690	0.05
Ukraine	600	0.05
Philippines	510	0.04
Switzerland	384	0.03
Hungary	319	0.02
India	314	0.02
New Zealand	307	0.02
Serbia and Montenegro	267	0.02
Turkey	262	0.02
Zaire	255	0.02
Tanzania	223	0.02
Costa Rica	210	0.02
Bosnia and Herzegovina	185	0.01
Zimbabwe	171	0.01
Slovenia	143	0.01
Gabon	136	0.01
Papua New Guinea	134	0.01
Bulgaria	132	0.01
Cyprus	129	0.01
Luxembourg	121	0.01
Gibraltar	114	0.01
Japan	107	0.01
Nigeria	95	0.01
Guinea	84	0.01
Croatia	79	0.01
Ecuador	78	0.01
Central African Rep.	77	0.01
Bolivia	57	0.00
British Virgin Islands	52	0.00
South Korea	52	0.00
Algeria	37	0.00
Greece	37	0.00
Mozambique	36	0.00
Jamaica	35	0.00
Dominican Republic	35	0.00
Belize	34	0.00
Vatican City	34	0.00
Peru	31	0.00
Panama (inc. Former Canal Zone)	27	0.00
Laos	25	0.00

UK imports of timber in 2002

Country	*£000*	*Percentage share*
Antigua and Barbuda	25	0.00
Surinam	21	0.00
Syria	18	0.00
Madagascar	17	0.00
Macedonia	16	0.00
Armenia	15	0.00
Burundi	14	0.00
Sharjah etc.	12	0.00
Dubai	12	0.00
Saudi Arabia	10	0.00
Mexico	8	0.00
Bahamas	8	0.00
Malta	8	0.00
Libya	7	0.00
Israel	6	0.00
Namibia	6	0.00
Argentina	6	0.00
Trinidad and Tobago	5	0.00
Mauritius	5	0.00
Swaziland	4	0.00
Sri Lanka	3	0.00
Gambia	2	0.00

Note:
Timber is defined as headings 247 and 248 of the Standard International Trade Classification, Rev 3 (SITC).
Source:
Compiled by DTI from HM Customs and Excise data

CABINET OFFICE

Public Appointments

24. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps have been taken towards improving transparency in the public appointments process. [125459]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office fully supports the Commissioner for Public Appointments Code of Practice, which provides Departments with a clear guide to the steps required to ensure an open and transparent appointments process.

26. **Mr. Michael Jabez Foster:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what age restrictions there are on public appointments. [125461]

Mr. Alexander: Generally, there are no age restrictions for people applying to be considered for public appointments. Appointments made by the Lord Chancellor to tribunals do have some restrictions.

Central Office of Information

25. **Bob Spink:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement about the recruitment practices of the Central Office of Information. [125460]

Mr. Alexander: The Central Office of Information's recruitment practices follow the recruitment code laid down by the Civil Service Commissioners.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Flight: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the cost was to his Department of mobile phones supplied to Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123147]

Mr. Alexander: Information on the cost to the Cabinet Office of mobile telephones supplied to Ministers and officials in each year since 1997 is not held centrally and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Widows and Orphans Pensions Schemes

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make it his policy to allow widows who married officers after they had retired from the service to benefit from the Widows and Orphans Pensions Schemes; and if he will make a statement. [125213]

Mr. Alexander: Before April 1978, the Civil Service pension scheme, in common with other public service schemes, paid pensions only to widows who had been married to officers at the time they left service. For service from 6 April 1978, in accordance with the provisions of the Social Security Pensions Act 1975, pensions have been paid regardless of when the marriage took place.

TRANSPORT

Workplace Parking (Nottingham)

12. **Mr. Graham Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what support he is giving to Nottingham city council's policy for a workplace parking levy; and if he will make a statement. [125445]

Mr. McNulty: I support Nottingham city council's development of an integrated local transport policy in which a workplace parking levy could play an integral part, but I cannot make any statement that would prejudge my decision should a scheme order be submitted to me for confirmation.

Rail Network

13. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to improve the rail network in northern England. [125446]

Mr. McNulty: The Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan sets out investment priorities and describes how delivery of the key targets in our 10-Year Transport Plan will be achieved. The SRA is in the process of establishing two new franchises for the north of England, which will separate long-distance and local services to allow concentrated management attention within each market.

Traffic Congestion (South-east)

14. **Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he plans to reduce traffic congestion in the south-east. [125447]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport made a statement to this House on 9 July 2003 on transport investment. This announced a number of measures to be taken forward in our major transport corridors which will tackle traffic congestion, support economic growth and improve safety on our strategic road network, including the south-east.

A46/A47 Link Road

15. **Keith Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to visit Leicester to discuss the operation of the A46 to A47 link road. [125448]

Mr. Jamieson: None. As the A46/A47 link road is a local road scheme, the responsibility for its operation rests with the local highway authority, Leicester city council.

Royal Mail

16. **John McDonnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the impact of the decision by Royal Mail to withdraw its mail services from the railways on the Government's plans to develop an integrated transport policy. [125449]

Mr. McNulty: Royal Mail's decision is a commercial matter for the company. The Government's policy is to promote a competitive sustainable distribution industry that brings economic and environmental benefits for the country. We remain committed to rail freight, and are giving the railways the sustained investment they have never had before.

Motorway Safety

17. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured in each of the last three years for which figures are available in crashes involving vehicles parked on the hard shoulders of motorways. [125450]

Mr. Jamieson: Information is available for the total number of those killed and seriously injured in road accidents involving vehicles parked on motorways for the three-year period from 1999 to 2001. The figures are:

(a) 62 people killed; and

(b) 118 people seriously injured.

The figures are not available on a yearly basis.

Rail Freight

18. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what Government financial incentives there are to encourage freight on the railways in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales; and if he will make a statement. [125451]

Mr. McNulty: Grants are available from the Strategic Rail Authority and the National Assembly for Wales to enable companies to move freight by rail instead of road where this is justified by environmental benefits.

Rail Services (Edinburgh)

19. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with the Strategic Rail Authority regarding long-distance rail services to and from Edinburgh. [125453]

Mr. McNulty: Ministers have regular contact with the Strategic Rail Authority over all aspects of their business. The Authority have recently announced that west coast trains will begin to serve Edinburgh from 2005. The Authority are also considering upgrade options for the east coast main line, on which they will consult later this year.

Air Safety

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessments of the risk of bird strikes at London Heathrow airport his Department has made in the last five years; [126018]

(2) how many incidents of bird strike have been reported at *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick and *(c)* Stansted in the last five years; [126023]

(3) what measures his Department undertakes to assess the potential risk of bird strike at UK airports. [126024]

Mr. McNulty: The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is responsible for the licensing of civil aerodromes in the UK. Licensed aerodromes are required to take all reasonable steps to secure that the aerodrome and its immediately surrounding airspace are safe at all times for use by aircraft. As a licensing condition, aerodrome operators are also specifically required to have in place procedures for the control of bird hazards. The CAA maintains an oversight of the effectiveness of the bird hazard control activities at all UK licensed aerodromes and comments on this activity in the individual aerodrome's annual audit report.

Although the Department for Transport has not conducted separate aerodrome bird strike risk assessments, it has organised, and currently chairs, a working group of representatives from relevant local authorities, private land owners, the CAA and Heathrow Airport Ltd. (HAL) to consider ways of expediting effective management of the bird population and habitat around Heathrow. This builds on HAL's on-going work with the Central Science Laboratory's Bird Strike Avoidance Team to develop and implement appropriate bird strike mitigation measures. It is anticipated that the results of the group's work will, in due course, be disseminated to other aerodromes around the country.

The following table sets out the number of reported bird strikes at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted over the last five years.

	Heathrow	*Gatwick*	*Stansted*
1998	36	32	14
1999	56	39	16
2000	46	39	21
2001	59	40	28
2002	71	51	30

Car Tax

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action the Government is taking to reduce the number of people who are illegally avoiding paying car tax. [125954]

Mr. Jamieson: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in co-operation with police forces, local authorities and other enforcement agencies already uses a wide range of measures to tackle evasion of vehicle excise duty (VED). These include on-street enforcement, wheelclamping and the use of roadside cameras. The enforcement programme successfully actioned some 820,000 cases, recovering some £110 million in fines, out of court settlements and relicensing revenue.

This programme is being strengthened by a range of new initiatives. These include combined operations with local authorities, police forces and fire services aimed at abandoned and unlicensed vehicles, wider use of police traffic cameras, and a new "hotline" facility to allow members of the public to report offences directly to DVLA, anonymously if they wish.

On 22 May I announced proposals to introduce a form of continuous registration, starting in 2004. Under these proposals a vehicle's registered keeper will remain liable for licensing it until it is formally transferred to a new keeper. Enforcement will include the imposition of standard penalties, with more severe fines for determined evaders following prosecution. There will be consultation on the details of these proposals later this year.

Bus Stop Clearway Orders (Newcastle upon Tyne)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the City of Newcastle upon Tyne requested approval of permanent bus stop clearway orders in respect of Osborne Road, NE2; and whether approval was granted. [125649]

Mr. McNulty: This is a matter for the Local Highway Authority, Newcastle city council.

The Council made application to the Department (Government Office for the North East) on 3 May 2001 for 24 hour Bus Stop Clearways on Osborne Road, Newcastle.

The Government Office responded on 13 July 2001. The Council were advised that it had the power to introduce the 24 hour Bus Stop Clearways by making the appropriate Traffic Regulation Order in accordance with the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and then to erect a sign to Diagram 974 as prescribed in the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) 1994 (which were current at the time of the inquiry), reflecting the times the restriction is in force.

Electric Trains

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the percentage energy loss is in converting the primary energy source into electrical driving energy for the modern electric train. [125761]

Dr. Howells: In contrast to older electric units such as Mark Is, which lose up to 60 per cent. to 70 per cent. of the energy supplied to them when starting up and operating at low speeds, modern electric multiple units such as Networkers have electronic control systems designed to prevent any significant energy loss in the provision of traction.

Eurostar Trains

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many Eurostar trains are kept unused in sidings owned by Network Rail; and what annual rent is charged for their storage. [122114]

Mr. McNulty: There are currently no unused Eurostar trains. However, trains are redeployed between different operating companies and purposes, according to circumstances, from time to time.

Foreign Seafarers (Employment Standards)

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to bring forward minimum employment and safety standards for foreign seafarers serving on UK registered ships. [125452]

Mr. Jamieson: The UK will play a full part in the current International Labour Organisation initiative to consolidate its maritime conventions in order to improve global observance of the standards of living and working conditions in international shipping.

Highways Agency

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures are being taken to ensure the co-ordination of activity between the Highways Agency and regional bodies in order to deliver greater integration and cost-efficiency. [125516]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency is continuing to work closely with regional planning bodies, the Government Offices for the Regions, the Regional Development Agencies, the Regional Assemblies and local authorities to ensure the Highways Agency has awareness of, and input into, important regional policies such as Regional Planning Guidance, Regional Economic Strategy, and the Regional Transport Strategy.

The agency has also built strong links with all other key regional and national transport stakeholders to support the delivery of sustainable transport solutions.

M42

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the decision to open a hard shoulder on the M42 to ease congestion. [125515]

Mr. Jamieson: The then Minister for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar), announced on 27 July 2001 that the M42 between Junctions 3a and 7 had been chosen as a pilot site for Active Traffic Management (ATM). The pilot will provide useful data and experience about a range of existing and new traffic management measures. This will include part-time use of the hard shoulder as a running lane for traffic at peak periods and at other times when there has been an incident, but only under carefully controlled conditions.

Motorway Speed Limits

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 8 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 689W, on motorway speed limits, if he will place the conclusions arising from this assessment in the Library. [125366]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on 14 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 27W.

National Walking Strategy

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make funding and additional resources available to support the implementation of the National Walking Strategy; and if he will make a statement; [126214]

(2) if he will establish a National Walking Authority to monitor progress of the National Walking Strategy and assist the Government in its implementation; [126215]

(3) when the National Walking Strategy will be published; and whether it will contain targets. [126216]

Dr. Howells: My Department issued a discussion document on walking on 30 June. "On the move: by foot" seeks views from all interests on how we might improve conditions for pedestrians and increase levels of walking. Responses to the document have been requested by 26 September and will inform our forward strategy in respect of resources, institutions and targets.

Private Office Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the running costs have been of Ministers' private offices in his Department in each year since 1997. [123110]

Mr. McNulty: The Department was formed on 29 May 2002. The estimated final outturn for the running costs of Ministers' private offices in 2002–03 is £1.3 million.

Rail Safety

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of the implementation of rail safety recommendations by the Railway Inspectorate over the last three years. [125556]

Mr. McNulty: In the last three years the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have published recommendations as part of their investigation reports into the Hatfield and Potters Bar rail crashes. HSE intend to publish progress reports on implementation of these recommendations once legal proceedings are concluded or not proceeded with.

The Health and Safety Commission progress report of July 2002 on implementation of the recommendations from the Southall, Ladbroke Grove and train protection public inquiries is in the Libraries of the House. A further report will be published later this summer.

Roads

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which major road schemes in England have been given *(a)* provisional and *(b)* full government approval in each of the last three years; what their current status is; and what the (i) anticipated start date and (ii) completion date is in each case. [125709]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House. A scheme at the M40 Junction 15 at Longbridge, was added to the Targeted Programme of Improvements (TPI) today.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research he has conducted into the consistency with which speed cameras on trunk roads record speeding motorists. [124797]

Mr. Jamieson: Decisions on issues relating to speed camera operation and enforcement of speed limits are a matter for chief constables of police.

PRIME MINISTER

Camp Delta

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations he has made to the US President concerning the future of the British detainees at Camp Delta. [124615]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy), *Official Report*, column 1152, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies), *Official Report*, columns 1152–53, and the hon. Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) *Official Report*, column 1155, at Prime Minister's questions on 9 July.

China

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his forthcoming visit to the People's Republic of China. [123676]

The Prime Minister: I will arrive in China on Monday 21 July and will stay away until Thursday 24 July, visiting Beijing, Hong Kong and Shanghai.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will use his forthcoming visit to the People's Republic of China (PRC) to express support for the Beijing talks mechanism for a peaceful solution to the North Korea nuclear issue involving the USA, North Korea and the PRC. [123679]

The Prime Minister: I will discuss the North Korea nuclear issue with the Chinese Government during my visit. We welcome the role that the Chinese Government has played in hosting trilateral talks.

European Constitution

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the effect of the proposed new EU constitution upon the representative role of Her Majesty The Queen. [125990]

The Prime Minister: Her Majesty The Queen's status and role as Head of State of the United Kingdom, including any representative functions, would be unaffected by any of the proposals in the draft Constitutional Treaty.

Government Reorganisation

Mr. Syms: To ask the Prime Minister what estimate he has made of *(a)* the costs arising from the recent Cabinet reshuffle and *(b)* the reorganisation costs of Government departments. [125042]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on 25 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 792W.

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will seek permission from the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee to allow publication of the source for the statement at page 6 of the dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, published in September 2002, that Iraq has sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa; and whether Her Majesty's Government provided the source material to the International Atomic Energy Agency. [123047]

The Prime Minister: It is not our practice to publish the source of intelligence reports. We asked the originators of our intelligence information to discuss the issue with the IAEA.

Adam Price: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had on the use of oil revenues to fund reconstruction in Iraq in the manner outlined to the United Nations on 10 May. [125235]

The Prime Minister: UN Security Council resolution 1483, which the UK co-sponsored, stipulates that Iraqi oil revenues must be used for purposes benefiting the people of Iraq, including economic reconstruction. I have always made it clear in relevant discussions that Iraqi oil is owned by the Iraqi people and its revenues should be used for the good of the people, consistent with UN Security Council resolutions.

Adam Price: To ask the Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had regarding *(a)* extra funding and *(b)* international assistance for the Iraqi police force. [125248]

The Prime Minister: Government officials have discussed with the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) how best the UK can contribute to the CPA's work to rebuild the Iraqi police service. The UK considers the restoration of the rule of law in Iraq to be a priority and will stay closely engaged with the CPA on issues of funding and assistance. In particular, the UK has deployed a senior police officer to Baghdad to assist with advising and training the new Iraq police service. In addition to this a further senior officer will deploy to Basra on 15 July to advise CPA (South). The CPA intends to hold a police contributor's conference shortly to garner support for a substantial international policing contribution and the UK is actively considering making a further commitment as part of this process.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on Iraq's attempts to purchase uranium from Niger. [125650]

The Prime Minister: The September dossier stated that

> "there is intelligence that Iraq has sought the supply of significant quantities of uranium from Africa".

This assessment drew on intelligence from more than one source. The IAEA has confirmed that Iraq did acquire uranium from Niger in the early 1980s.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on *(a)* the reasons for defining the defection of Iraqi Lieutenant General Hussein Kamal as important in the Government's dossier, Weapons of Mass Destruction, of 24 September 2002 and *(b)* the value of the General's testimony to UN weapons inspectors that all proscribed weapons had been destroyed on his orders. [125936]

The Prime Minister: Lieutenant General Hussein Kamal defected in 1995. As the dossier makes clear, following his defection Iraq released over 2 million documents relating to its weapons of mass destruction programmes and acknowledged that it had pursued a biological programme that led to the deployment of actual weapons.

In his testimony to UN weapons inspectors, Kamal claimed that he had ordered the destruction of all biological, chemical and nuclear weapons and missiles. We know that Iraq did not do this and continued to be in breach of UN Security Council resolutions. Intelligence obtained by the British Government, reflected in the September dossier, has reported on the possession and production of chemical and biological weapons and ballistic missiles by Iraq. Equipment related to Iraq's nuclear programme dating back to 1991 has recently been recovered from the garden of a scientist in Iraq.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Prime Minister what the deterioration rates are of the *(a)* VX nerve agent, *(b)* sarin and *(c)* botulinum toxin which he declared had been unaccounted for when UN weapons inspectors left Iraq in 1998, during his statement to the House of 18 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 76W. [125937]

The Prime Minister: The stability of the materials quoted depends very much on the initial purity and the precise storage conditions. Their usable lifetime as chemical or biological warfare agents, can range from a few months to tens of years. Even partially degraded material may still pose a significant hazard.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his evidence to the Liaison Committee, 8 July, Question 186, (1) on what basis he calculated that *(a)* it was not true that 90 per cent. of the second dossier came from plagiarised material and *(b)* two of the three parts of the dossier were based on intelligence; [125968]

(2) what proportions of the second Iraqi dossier were based upon the work of *(a)* Ibrahim al-Marishi in the Middle East Review of International Affairs of September 2002, *(b)* Sean Boyne in Jane's Intelligence Review of 1997, *(c)* Ken Gause in Jane's Intelligence Review of 2002, *(d)* Anthony Corderman in Key Targets on Iraq of February 1998 and *(e)* UK intelligence services. [125955]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the House on 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 583W.

The published memorandum from the Foreign Secretary and my Director of Communications and Strategy made clear that sections one and three were based on intelligence material and highlighted the relevant parts in section two that were based on intelligence material. The intelligence material was authorised by the relevant intelligence agency for use in the public in domain, in accordance with the procedures in place at the time.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister when he was first informed that the reports relating to attempts by the Iraqi regime to obtain nuclear related materials from Niger were *(a)* of dubious basis and *(b)* possibly based on forgeries; and what recent discussions he has had with the US administration on the reports. [126037]

The Prime Minister: In February 2003, the IAEA received a number of documents related to Iraqi attempts to obtain uranium. On 7 March 2003, Dr. el-Baradei announced that the IAEA had concluded that these documents were not authentic.

I speak to President Bush regularly on many matters. It would not be appropriate to disclose the contents of those discussions.

Korea

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to visit the Republic of Korea. [123835]

The Prime Minister: I will visit Korea on Sunday 20 July where I will have my first meeting with President Roh in Seoul.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Consultations

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will list the consultation documents issued by the Department in each of the last four years; what the cost was of producing each of these; how many documents were issued in each consultation; and how many responses were received in each consultation. [124573]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is not collated on a central basis and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, a list of consultation exercises run by DFID is available at www.dfid.gov.uk.

Departmental Strategies

Mr. Wood: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what measures are in place to ensure that account is taken of the concerns of aid agencies, human rights organisations and other non-governmental organisations in developing the Department's strategies. [124619]

Hilary Benn: DFID has significant involvement with a wide range of NGOs and other civil society organisations. This includes meeting, discussing and consulting widely with them, at both ministerial and official level.

Examples include: DFID's Information and Civil Society Department consult widely with the British Overseas NGOs for Development (BOND) network in relation to funding schemes, and have made improvements to funding procedures based on the views of BOND'S members; the International Financial Institutions Department holds regular official meetings with NGOs, particularly focusing on Poverty Reduction

Strategy process; many of our Policy teams engage in wider dialogue with individual organisations on key policy and strategic areas; and a number of key NGOs made submissions to DFID White Papers and have responded to our Institutional Strategy Papers and Target Strategy Papers.

EU Humanitarian Aid

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will list *(a)* the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU committee on implementation of humanitarian aid operations, *(b)* the number of times, and the dates, on which it has met since January 2002, *(c)* the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, *(d)* the decisions it has made since January 2002 and *(e)* the means used to communicate the decisions to the House. [110308]

Hilary Benn: The European Community's Humanitarian Aid Committee (HAC) does not have a fixed membership, but consists of delegates drawn from each of the 15 European member states. The HAC meets on average once a month, excluding August (and often December). In addition to this, each Presidency usually holds an informal HAC to discuss issues of substance in more detail. Including both formal and informal HACs there have been 19 meetings since January 2002.

The Department for International Development usually sends one or two delegates to the HAC, drawn from our Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department or our regional departments.

At the HAC meetings, member states review the Annual Global Plans (large scale humanitarian country strategies) and Decisions (less detailed, smaller scale humanitarian programmes) drawn up by the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) for ongoing humanitarian assistance to countries, regions, or specific population groups. ECHO also uses the HAC to inform member states of decisions taken under ECHO's own delegated authority both on its smallest programmes, and on those taken under the Primary Emergency Procedures for rapid disbursement (recent examples include Iraq, Algeria and the Palestinian Territories). In November of each year, ECHO presents its overall strategy for the following year for discussion by member states. ECHO also presents at various times during the year procedural and thematic papers on various aspects of EC assistance for member state's information and comment.

The role of the Humanitarian Aid Committee is to oversee the powers delegated to the European Commission by the European Council of Ministers. As with all Comitology Committees, documents circulated at the HAC are not routinely deposited for scrutiny under established scrutiny procedures, unless they are politically significant. Since January 2002 DFID has deposited for scrutiny the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office's Annual Report for 2001 (COM (2002) 322 FINAL).

Together with member states, the Commission has been conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of Comitology Committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

The Working Group on the Friends of Comitology is meeting later this month to discuss proposals for interim reform.

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the Committee. The second report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 10 January 2003, ref 5060/03, COM(03)733.

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every Comitology Committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

General Agreement on Trade in Services

Mr. Brady: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what estimate he has made of the economic effect on developing countries which will arise from liberalisation of trade in services. [125180]

Hilary Benn: All countries involved in the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) are responsible for conducting their own impact assessments as a part of the process of deciding which sectors to open to foreign competition. It would be neither desirable nor practical for either the WTO or developed country Governments to make an assessment of service-sector liberalisation on behalf of developing countries.

However, we recognise that developing countries require support in this area. To this end, DFID is co-operating with UNCTAD and the World bank on a programme of work which will help inform developing country assessments.

Iraq

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what requests the Department has received for medical drugs from health professionals in Iraq. [124678]

Hilary Benn: We have received no specific requests for drugs from health professionals in Iraq.

The World Health Organisation's assessment is that there is no overall shortage of medical supplies in Iraq, although there are still shortages of drugs for some specific conditions. The drugs supply pipeline is funded until spring 2004.

In Basra, an oxygen shortfall has resulted from production problems in local manufacturing plants. Immediate emergency needs have been met by importing oxygen from Kuwait. Work is under way to restore existing production capacity in Basra, and ultimately to install new production capacity which would also improve the quality of the oxygen supplied for medical use.

DFID's assistance to health and nutrition in the current crisis is channelled through United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, Save the Children Fund, CARE and a number of other non-governmental organisations. £12 million has been allocated specifically to health and nutrition activities (not including food aid); £35 million has also been allocated to humanitarian agencies, not earmarked to specific sectors, a proportion of which is being spent in the health sector.

Adam Price: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent assessment the Department has made of the rate of child illness in Iraq. [125234]

Hilary Benn: Before the recent conflict, the effects of mismanagement, war, migration of medical staff and economic sanctions had significantly weakened Iraq's capacity to protect the health of its children: almost a third of children in the centre and south suffered from chronic malnutrition; the prevalence of low birth-weight babies had increased more than five-fold over the previous 10 years; and the under-five mortality rate, at 131 per 1,000 live births, was very high. Immediately after the recent conflict, looting, insecurity and an initial breakdown of public services exacerbated existing problems. Increased levels of diarrhoea and vaccine-preventable diseases among children were reported.

Subsequently, progress has been made in restoring health services and clean water supplies. UNICEF has re-started routine vaccination, including a catch-up campaign for children who missed immunisation during the conflict. Sufficient vaccines are now in Iraq for six to eight months of vaccinations. The Coalition Provisional Authority has announced that public health spending in the July to December 2003 budget will be US$210 million, including $125 million for supplies and equipment and $31 million for generators to supply power to hospitals in Baghdad.

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Adam Price: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent assessment the Department has made of the state of Iraqi hospitals. [125246]

Hilary Benn: Hospital infrastructure was little damaged during the recent conflict, but the health care system was badly affected by the subsequent insecurity in which equipment and supplies were looted and water and electricity systems disrupted. The United Nations reported in June 2003 that Iraq's health system was functioning at only 30 to 50 per cent. of its pre-conflict capacity.

Some progress is being made. All 240 hospitals in the country are in operation. The Coalition Provisional Authority is making considerable efforts to improve the water supply, sanitation, power and security difficulties. Coalition forces have been training Iraqi security staff to guard medical facilities. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been active throughout Iraq replacing missing equipment, and supplying water, power, and medical supplies. Regular salary payments to hospital staff have been resumed.

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Kenya

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what agencies in Kenya received money from the Department in each year since 1997. [124479]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development funds a large number of civil society, private sector, and multilateral agencies in Kenya, including through umbrella bodies which channel resources to a wide range of organisations.

A detailed breakdown of the total number of DFID partners is not held centrally, and is available only at disproportionate cost. A broad indication of the funds provided to civil society, private sector and multilateral agencies over the last three years is set out in the following table.

£ million

	Civil society agencies	*Private sector agencies*	*Multilateral agencies*
2000–01	11	2	9
2001–02	12	2	3
2002–03	19	3	0

Liberia

Norman Lamb: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what action he intends to take in respect of the World Health Organisation's call for supplies and funds to combat the health crisis in Liberia; and if he will make a statement. [125303]

Hilary Benn: I refer the hon. Member to my statement of 25 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 39WS.

The World Health Organisation's appeal for supplies and funds to provide healthcare to Liberians is one of several urgent requests that we have received in recent weeks from the international humanitarian community.

DFID has committed £1.5 million in response to the present crisis in Liberia, in addition to the £1 million we gave to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Medecins sans Frontieres in March 2003. We have allocated £500,000 to ICRC, £374,000 to Merlin and £316,000 to Save the Children Fund (UK).

We shall commit the balance of the funding available to agencies that have access to those in need and continue to keep the situation under close review.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment he has made of the humanitarian situation in Liberia; and if he will make a statement on security conditions for aid agencies operating in Liberia. [125304]

Hilary Benn: Our information on the humanitarian situation in Liberia is provided by the United Nations and the other international humanitarian agencies that are maintaining a presence there. Although the UN has plans to return expatriate personnel to the country as soon as conditions allow, for now they are relying on information from their country staff and the international non-Government organisations. Only a few agencies have an expatriate presence in Liberia and this is limited mainly to the capital, Monrovia.

The reports we are receiving describe the conditions as very poor. Humanitarian activities are severely hampered by looting of vehicles, fuel, medical supplies and food by all the main parties to the conflict. There are severe shortages, especially of food and clean water. Sanitation is virtually non-existent, and with around one-third of the population now located within Monrovia, the impact on an already over-stretched infrastructure is serious. We have little hard information on the situation outside the capital.

Cholera cases are reported to be significantly above the norm. Hospitals (of which only one has been functioning recently) and health centres are finding it difficult to cope. It is vital that the present lull in the fighting continues to enable the international community to re-engage, with access to all areas.

We have allocated £1.5 million in response to the recent deterioration in the humanitarian situation, in addition to £1 million that we allocated in March 2003. We are liaising closely with the principal agencies concerned. We and other donors will be joining with members of the UN and other humanitarian agencies at a meeting in Dakar, Senegal, on 17 and 18 July 2003 to discuss the situation across the west Africa sub-region, including Liberia.

Montserrat

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent assessment he has made of the level of humanitarian aid reaching the people of Montserrat. [125322]

Hilary Benn: Our aid to Montserrat is in the form of development and budgetary assistance. Since the onset of the volcanic crisis, we have provided some £180 million. A further £45.6 million is available for disbursement over the UK financial year period 2003–04 to 2005–06, representing a 50 per cent. increase over the sum originally available for that period. All of the money is used to maintain essential services and to improve the lives and livelihoods of the people of Montserrat.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on disaster relief to Montserrat. [125993]

Hilary Benn: We provided substantial emergency assistance for Montserrat in the immediate aftermath of the volcanic crisis in the mid-1990s. This included provision of housing, essential services and infrastructure which had been lost or seriously damaged. Increasingly, our assistance is now geared towards other productive activity, which will help Montserrat towards its goal of renewed self-sufficiency. For example, a new airport to replace the one at risk from the volcano is now under construction and should become operational next year.

We were very concerned to learn about the recent volcanic events in Montserrat. DFID officials are in direct contact with the Montserratian authorities to assist in every possible way.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on the provision of housing in Montserrat. [125996]

Hilary Benn: The Government of Montserrat's policy is to make housing assistance available for all those on the island who are deemed eligible for it. We have devoted substantial resources in support of this policy and for provision of associated infrastructure to help Montserratians affected by volcanic activity. We and the Montserrat authorities will continue to keep those needs under close and regular review.

Performance Fund

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what the *(a)* objectives, *(b)* targets and *(c)* main budgetary compartments are for the (i) Africa Performance Fund and (ii) Asia Performance Fund; and if he will make a statement. [122736]

Hilary Benn: [*pursuant to his reply, 2 July 2003, c. 301W*] The budgeted figures given in the table for Asia for financial years 2000–01 and 2001–02 were unfortunately not correct. The table and the text in the paragraph regarding Asia have therefore been revised as follows:

Divisional performance funds were introduced from 2000–01 as reserves to be allocated in-year by directors, largely to reward good performance but also to respond to unforeseen demands and opportunities, including urgent humanitarian needs. They provide flexibility to allocate additional funds to those countries and institutions where progress on reform enables effective use of funds in pursuit of poverty reduction.

The table shows the total amounts budgeted:

DFID performance funds

£ million

Year	*Africa*	*Asia*
2000–01	57	20
2001–02	10	36
2002–03	14	18
2003–04	35	0
2004–05[1]	151	65
2005–06[1]	289	130

[1] Includes amounts provisionally earmarked from Director General Performance Fund from 2004–05.

In Africa in 2000–01 there were two payments, one of £29 million to assist copper industry restructuring in Zambia, and another of £28 million as programme aid to support economic reform in Kenya. In 2001–02, a smaller sum was available, of which £7 million was spent on humanitarian assistance: £5 million in the DRC (through the International Red Cross) and £2 million on humanitarian projects in the Sudan. A further £0.25 million was spent on AFRICAP, an African micro-finance investment fund. In 2002–03, £10 million was spent on programme aid to Ethiopia as our bilateral relationship strengthened, £3.2 million on humanitarian work (in Angola, Sudan and the Great Lakes region), and a further £0.8 million contribution to AFRICAP. Some £35 million is available in 2003–04, much of which will be needed for humanitarian work.

In financial years 2000–01 and 2001–02 Asia's performance fund was used for various purposes including transfers to programmes in the Middle East and Pakistan. Not all the funds allocated to the Fund were needed in these years; resources not required were re-allocated to other parts of the DFID's programme. In 2002–03, funds were used for Afghanistan and other humanitarian work. Asia does not have a performance fund allocation for 2003–04.

From 2004–05 onwards, resources for performance funds rise significantly. These funds will be allocated in part before the year commences, although significant amounts will remain to be allocated in-year. They will be targeted at those countries that are currently performing less well or that are in or emerging from conflict. We are already planning high and stable levels of spending in countries with a clear commitment to, and capacity to deliver, poverty reduction.

Street Children

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how many street children there are in Asia; in which Asian countries they are located; and how many street children there are in each country. [123733]

Hilary Benn: It is difficult to provide accurate data on the overall numbers of street children in Asia or to provide a breakdown by country. Estimates are unreliable and coverage is patchy. According to UNICEF there are roughly about 25 million children estimated to be living on the streets in Asia. However there is no reliable information for many Asian countries. In India the Ministry of Social Welfare estimates that there are between 75,000 to 250,000 street children in Calcutta alone. UNICEF estimate there are 15,000 street children in Vietnam and 16,000 in Sri Lanka.

The fundamental cause of children living on the street is poverty. This is exacerbated by chronic hunger, lack of school places and family conflict. Between 30 per cent. to 50 per cent. of children in South Asia are malnourished. Despite improvements in education provision around 41 per cent. of children drop out of school before they reach the fifth grade. Between 30 per cent. to 55 per cent. of school age children are working. Many of these children are exploited through child labour or are involved in the sex industry. Unless these problems are addressed the problems of street children in Asia will continue to grow.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how much aid his Department gives to tackle the problem of street children in Asia; who this money is given to; and what the money is spent on. [123734]

Hilary Benn: Urban poverty, homelessness, lack of education and the demand for child labour forces children to leave their families and live on the streets in Asia. It is important that these underlying problems are addressed as well as helping street children directly. Our bilateral programmes in Asia aim to alleviate family poverty more generally as a basis for addressing the needs of street children.

Many of our programmes support NGO activities that advocate for the rights of children and work directly with street children. In Bangladesh we are supporting two NGOs to provide informal education to vulnerable working children in urban areas at a cost of £8 million. In Burma we have been supporting a street and working children project with World Vision a total cost of £450,000. In India we are supporting a local NGO to work with child street vendors and have several other small projects in the pipeline focusing on vulnerable working children in urban areas.

We are providing £1.6 million to Save the Children to work directly with vulnerable children in the Mekong sub region. This project aims to prevent poor rural children being trafficked to urban areas in the region for purposes of sexual exploitation and under age employment. This helps to reduce the potential for these children to end up on the street.

Other DFID activities also contribute indirectly to addressing the problems of street children. Improving basic education for every child is the main contribution that Asian Governments can make to reducing child poverty and indirectly to reducing the numbers of street children. Support to basic education is a major focus of our bilateral programme in Asia and in 2001–02 DFID committed £130 million to support this.

Another example is the £12 million urban poverty reduction project in Cochin in India that has helped to improve basic services for poor families and their children.

Water and Sanitation Programmes

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what proportion of the Department's funds have been allocated for water and sanitation programmes in each year since 1998. [126080]

Hilary Benn: Presenting accurate data on expenditure for the water and sanitation sector is not straightforward. Reporting years and methods differ, especially between DFID's multilateral and bilateral partners, but we are working with our partners to improve the quality and hence the reliability of these data.

Over the last three years DFID has undertaken a detailed analysis of all projects to determine its total water related bilateral expenditure. This showed that total bilateral water expenditure was £82 million in 1999–2000, £91 million in 2000–01 and £87 million in 2001–02. This equates to 6.19 per cent., 6.43 per cent. and 5.77 per cent. respectively of DFID's total bilateral expenditure over this period. These amounts include bilateral expenditure on all aspects of water including emergency assistance and international water programmes, but exclude expenditure that may be allocated to the water sector from direct budget support and from multilateral funding.

We have only calculated figures using this method back to 1999–2000.

In 2001–02, DFID channelled £1.3 billion through multilateral organisations. DFID's contribution to multilateral spend on water and sanitation is estimated at around £40 million per year.

In 2001–02, DFID provided £296 million as general budget support to country governments (including sector support), which was 20 per cent. of our total bilateral programme and 10 per cent. of our entire programme. An internal exercise to allocate direct budget support notionally by sector concluded that only a small proportion (less than one per cent) went to the water sector.

Much of the above information is included in the National Audit Office review of DFID's work in the water sector (NAO Report No. HC351, 31 January 2003). DFID publishes details of its aid expenditure annually. Statistics on International Development which is available in the Library, also provides details of the volume, type, purpose and destination of all UK development assistance.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Alcohol Advertising

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to restrict the advertising of alcohol. [125144]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, in close collaboration with other Government Departments, including the Department of Health, is currently developing the national alcohol harm reduction strategy. The Strategy Unit is due to publish an interim analysis paper in the summer and its final report setting out the cross-governmental alcohol harm reduction strategy in the autumn. The final report will consider a wide variety of issues including the advertising of alcohol.

British Overseas Territories

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what responsibilities her Department undertakes in connection with British Overseas Territories. [123899]

Mr. Caborn: DCMS has responsibilities under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention with regard to Henderson Island (South Pacific Ocean), Cough Island (South Atlantic Ocean) and the Historic Town of St. George, Bermuda, World Heritage Sites. This Department has also provided advice to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Gibraltar's draft legislation relating to the Television Without Frontiers Directive (89/552/EEC as amended by 97/36/EC).

Civil List

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what functions have had funding transferred from the grant in aid budget to the Civil List since May 1997, broken down by the *(a)* function transferred, *(b)* date of transfer and *(c)* current annual sum involved. [122118]

Mr. Caborn: In April 2001 a transfer of responsibilities occurred between the Civil List and the Property Services Grant in Aid. The following were transferred from the grant in aid to the Civil List at a cost of £724,000, enabling the grant in aid to take over financial responsibility for the Court Post Office:

congratulatory cards;

Gentlemen-at-arms and Yeomen of the Guard;

porter and non-domestic cleaners;

the Separate allocation, which is available to the Sovereign for use at her discretion for such things as furnishings; and

St. James's Palace state apartments.

The information on current costs is not readily available, but I shall write to the hon. Member and place copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many staff of her Department were redeployed out of London and the south-east in the last five years. [125359]

Mr. Caborn: No staff within the Department have been redeployed out of London and the south-east in the last five years.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by her Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if she will make a statement. [126205]

Mr. Caborn: DCMS has signed no IT outsourcing contracts since 1997.

Royal Palaces

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what definition applies to the terms *(a)* occupied and *(b)* unoccupied in respect of royal palaces. [125330]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* An occupied royal palace is an official residence where members of the royal family live and carry out official duties. The unoccupied royal palaces were previously, but are no longer, used by members of the royal family.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what authorisation process is applied by the Department for the occupation of a royal palace. [125331]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* The occupied palaces are owned by the Queen as Sovereign on behalf of the nation. How the properties are used in fulfilling the requirements and functions of the Head of State is a matter for Her Majesty the Queen, although proposals are discussed with this Department wherever appropriate.

Sport England

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on staffing levels in *(a)* Sport England headquarters and *(b)* its regional offices in (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04. [125323]

Mr. Caborn: Details of Sport England's staff numbers in 2002–03 are as follows.

	1 April 2002	*31 March 2003*
Headquarters	276	231
Regional offices	183	177
Total	459	408

By 30 September 2003, there are expected to be 116 staff in headquarters and 150 in regional offices.

Sports Funding

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the sports in receipt of World Class lottery funding. [125219]

Mr. Caborn: The following sports are currently in receipt of World Class lottery funding:

archery;
athletics;
athletics-disability;
badminton;
boccia;
boxing;
canoeing;
cricket;
cycling;
diving;
equestrian;
fencing-disability;
goalball;
golf-ladies;
golf-mens;
gymnastics-rhythmic;
gymnastics-sports acrobatics;
gymnastics-womens artistic/trampolining;
gymnastics-mens artistic;
hockey;
ice skating;
judo;
karate;
modern pentathlon;
netball;
orienteering;
paraplegic shooting;
powerlifting-disability;
rowing;
rugby league;
rugby union-mens;
rugby union-womens;
sailing;
skeleton;
skiing;
snowboarding;
speed skating;
squash;
swimming;
swimming-disability;
table tennis;
table tennis-disability;
taekwondo;
target shooting;
trampolining;
triathlon;
waterskiing;
weightlifting;
wheelchair basketball, and
wheelchair rugby.

Tourism

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage tourism contributed to the gross domestic product of England in each of the last two financial years. [125098]

Mr. Caborn: It is not currently possible to calculate the percentage which tourism contributed to the gross domestic product of England in the last two financial years, due to delays in the production of National Statistics' Regional Accounts. However, the equivalent figure for the contribution of tourism to the UK's GDP in the calendar year 2001 was 4.5 per cent., and the proportion for England can be expected to be of a similar magnitude.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much she spent advertising each of the regions as a tourist destination *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* internationally in the last two financial years. [125099]

Mr. Caborn: In 2001–02, this Department allocated to the English Tourism Council (ETC) £3.8 million from the Reserve to assist the domestic recovery of tourism from foot and mouth disease; over half of that amount was then passed to the 10 regional tourist boards (RTBs) in England and much of it used for promotional activities. In addition, of the sums granted by the Department to the Greater London Authority (GLA) to promote tourism, £500,000 was used for domestic marketing in 2001–02 and £100,000 in 2002–03.

In 2001–02 and 2002–03, the British Tourist Authority (BTA) was responsible for marketing Britain overseas as a tourist destination. It did not allocate funds for individual regions of Britain, but promoted Britain as a whole in a way which maximised the impact of its campaigns in individual markets overseas. DCMS allocated the following amounts to the BTA in the last two years:

£ million

BTA	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Baseline grant in aid	35.5	35.5
Additional sums from Reserve to assist recovery	14.2	19.0

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much she spent advertising the UK as a tourist destination in the last two financial years. [125100]

Mr. Caborn: In 2001–02 and 2002–03, the British Tourist Authority (BTA) was responsible for marketing Britain overseas as a tourist destination. DCMS allocated the following amounts to the BTA in the last two years.

£ million

BTA	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Baseline grant in aid	35.5	35.5
Additional sums from Reserve to assist recovery	14.2	19.0

The BTA's statutory role has been the overseas promotion of Britain, rather than the UK, although it had powers to encourage people to visit Northern Ireland by agreement with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB).

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage tourism contributed to the GDP in the north-east in the last two financial years. [125119]

Mr. Caborn: The only figure for tourism's contribution to GDP in the north-east is for the calendar year 2000. This was derived from "Tourism Impact—a Pilot Study for the North East", which was published in September 2002. This estimated tourism's contribution to the GDP in the north-east to be 3.5 per cent. This study was jointly funded by the regional development agency, ONE, and the Department.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many international tourists visited *(a)* England and *(b)* the north-east in 2001 and 2002; and what percentage of international tourists to the UK this represented. [125120]

Mr. Caborn: The following table shows the number of staying visits (visits which included a stay of at least one night) to the north-east, England and the UK in 2001 and 2002. The figures for 2002 are provisional.

	2001		*2002*	
	Staying visits (thousand)	*Percentage of all staying visits*	*Staying visits (thousand)*	*Percentage of all staying visits*
North-east	440	2	520	2
Total England	19,320	93	20,390	92
Total UK	20,980	100	22,120	100

Source:
International Passenger Survey, National Statistics.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

EU Institutions (Visits)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Leader of the House what percentage of hon. Members have used the facility of a visit to an EU institution in each of the years for which figures are available. [124996]

Mr. Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my predecessor on 21 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 106W. I understand that the percentage of Members who used this facility during 2002–03 rose to 24 per cent. This includes visits to national parliaments as well as to EU institutions.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Leader of the House what discussions he has had with Foreign Office colleagues regarding using the visits by hon. Members to EU institutions. [125177]

Mr. Hain: I have as yet had no discussions with Foreign and Commonwealth Office colleagues regarding the Members' European travel scheme, which allows up to three visits each year to national parliaments of EU member states and those of candidate countries, as well as to EU institutions in Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg.

Pre-legislative Scrutiny

Mr. Allen: To ask the Leader of the House what steps he is taking to ensure that all Bills will undergo pre-legislative scrutiny. [124976]

Mr. Hain: The Government have never proposed that it would be possible to make all bills available for pre-legislative scrutiny. Some nine Bills will be published this session for pre-legislative scrutiny, a considerable increase on last session. I hope that we will be in a position to publish a similar number or more during the course of next session.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Leader of the House what progress he has made in enabling pre-legislative scrutiny to be carried out on-line. [124977]

Mr. Hain: Whether to carry out pre-legislative scrutiny on-line is a matter for decision by the Committee concerned, and the provision of facilities and funding for it are a matter for the House authorities. The Joint Committee on the draft Communications Bill found its on-line forum extremely useful, and I hope that other Committees will also choose to make use of the opportunities which Information Technology provides. I welcome work being done by the Committee Office to identify and promote good practice in this area.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the *(a)* size and *(b)* duration of British military patrols outside Kabul in Afghanistan. [125008]

Mr. Ingram: The main body of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) began to deploy to Mazar-e-Sharif on 10 July 2003 and is still in the process of establishing itself in the city. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence explained to the House on 8 May 2003, *Official Report*, columns 38–40WS, the PRT will be active across the five surrounding provinces of Balkh, Faryab, Jowzjan, Sar-e-Pol and Samangan. In preparation for that role, advance teams have recently visited sites across these provinces at irregular intervals.

Bosnia

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions took place at the recent NATO ministerial meeting in Madrid concerning the EU decision at Copenhagen to assume the NATO peacekeeping mandate in Bosnia; and whether *(a)* NATO and *(b)* the United States has accepted that decision. [124362]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

The European Union has not taken a decision to "assume the NATO peace-keeping mandate in Bosnia". The Conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council of 12/13 December 2002 noted "the European Union's willingness to lead a military operation in Bosnia following SFOR". This would of course require a prior decision by NATO to terminate its mission, as was the case when the EU took over the stabilisation role from NATO earlier this year in Macedonia. The transition of the much larger mission in Bosnia will require extensive discussions between the EU and NATO. There was a brief informal discussion of this issue, as part of the wider discussion of EU/NATO co-operation in the Balkans at the NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting in Madrid.

CBRN Emergencies

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training of Territorial Army personnel has taken place in 2003 in respect of dealing with CBRN emergencies; and if he will make a statement. [125617]

Mr. Caplin: All Territorial Army personnel are expected to undertake training in respect of dealing with Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear attack, initially as part of their recruitment training, and annually as one of their Individual Training Directives (ITDs).

In order for an individual to be considered either for operational deployment, or inclusion within a Civil Contingency Reaction Force, they must have completed the relevant ITD in the last 12 months.

Cluster Munitions

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research he has commissioned on the number of civilians *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured by cluster submunitions by (i) the International Red Cross and (ii) other agencies in Iraq. [116813]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 5 June 2003]:* We recognise that unexploded cluster bomblets, and indeed all unexploded ordnance, is a matter of humanitarian concern and we are fully committed to work towards the clearance of unexploded ordnance.

No research has been commissioned by the Ministry of Defence on casualties caused to civilians by cluster munitions.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reviews have been undertaken by his Department regarding the civilian casualty figures caused by unexploded cluster submunitions in the post-conflict regions of *(a)* the Gulf, *(b)* Kosovo and *(c)* Afghanistan; and what assessment he has made of the impact of these bomblets on Iraqi civilians in the future. [116818]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 5 June 2003]:* No such reviews and assessments have been undertaken by the Ministry of Defence.

Conflict Prevention

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of his budget in *(a)* 2002–03 will be and *(b)* 2003–04 was spent on conflict prevention. [125240]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence's outturn for 2002–03 will not be finalised until publication of the Departmental Resource Account in the autumn. However, based on provisional outturn, the proportion of the 2002–03 budget spent on conflict prevention operations and activities is as follows:

	Percentage
Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL)	6.56
Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL)	5.22

It is not possible to estimate at this stage the proportion of the 2003–04 budget that will be spent on conflict prevention, as this will depend on the demand for military involvement in each theatre of operations.

Departmental Policies (Pendle)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what policies *(a)* initiated and *(b)* managed by his Department since 2001 have had an impact on Pendle; and if he will make a statement. [124089]

Mr. Caplin: The purpose of the Ministry of Defence is to provide the capabilities needed to defend the United Kingdom and Overseas Territories, and protect British people and interests, as well as act as a force for good by strengthening international peace and security. Defence is a national activity and as such policy initiatives and spending are characterised as in the regions rather than for the regions.

While the MOD makes a positive contribution to the community through the management of a Cadet Hut at Butts Yard, Barnoldswick, there are no other Defence establishments in the constituency. Some of our policies may have an indirect effect on people and organisations in Pendle, e.g. recruitment to the armed forces or the MOD from this area, or the presence in Pendle of defence suppliers, including their sub-contractors and employees. However, this regionally based information is not held centrally by the Department and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Diego Garcia

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which vessels are moored in British waters off Diego Garcia; and if he will make a statement. [125568]

Mr. Rammell: I have been asked to reply.

In accordance with our various agreements with the US, a number of US merchant vessels, chartered by the US Government, are at any time moored in Diego Garcia waters. From time-to-time US and other visiting warships also moor there, as do fishing vessels which have been brought in on suspicion of illegal fishing in British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) waters, vessels engaged in scientific research in the waters of the Territory and the BIOT Fisheries Protection Vessel.

Drummore Harbour

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Drummore harbour will next be dredged. [125736]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence has no plans for dredging Drummore Harbour at this time.

EU Committees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many officials in the Department serve on EU committees or working parties. [116094]

Mr. Ingram: The highest military body established in the Council is the EU Military Committee, which is comprised of Chiefs of Defence Staff who meet at least once every six months. At other times, the EUMC and its Working Group are serviced by five Brussels-based United Kingdom military staff working for the UK

Military Representative to the EU, who also functions as the UK Military Representative to NATO. Two Ministry of Defence civilian officials are also based in Brussels to support ESDP aspects of the work of the Political and Security Committee and its preparatory groups. From time to time, specialist staff based in the UK also attend working group meetings in Brussels, for example to plan crisis management exercises or for detailed work on force development. These meetings generally do not have a fixed membership, and the numbers attending vary depending on the subjects under discussion, but the total number of UK-based MOD staff involved is about 20.

European Security and Defence Policy

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects that the EU will be able to deploy forces of Corps level under the provisions of the European Security and Defence Pact. [125608]

Mr. Hoon: There is no "European Security and Defence Pact". Responding to the Headline Goal established under the European Security and Defence Policy, European Union member states have together already offered to make available for ESDP operations forces of greater than corps size. The General Affairs and External Relations Council in May agreed that the EU now has operational capability across the full range of Petersberg tasks, albeit limited and constrained by recognised shortfalls, which particularly affect speed of deployment and level of risk for larger, higher-intensity tasks. The number of forces which could be deployed for any particular ESDP operation would depend on the operational scenario and what member states and other countries decided to contribute.

Expenditure Approvals (Iraq)

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many urgent operational requirements in excess of £500,000 his Department has approved *(a)* since 27 January and *(b)* since 1 November 2002; and what the total value is of such requirements in connection with operations in Iraq. [121452]

Mr. Ingram: About 110 Urgent Operational Requirements for in excess of £500,000 have been approved since 1 November 2002 as part of preparations for, and the prosecution of, decisive operations in Iraq. These have had a value in the region of £483 million, and include 19 measures approved since 27 January 2003. In addition, a small number of measures are being approved to support the continuing presence of UK armed forces in Iraq.

Forces Pensions

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his Answer of 4 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 141W, on the interest payable on tax incorrectly deducted from armed forces pensions, whether he has made a decision on whether a further payment should be made. [125540]

Mr. Caplin: As my predecessor, Dr. Moonie explained in his answer of 4 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 141W, where it has been confirmed that Service pensioners have paid tax incorrectly, they have received from the Inland Revenue a refund of tax, and, in appropriate cases, the statutory repayment supplement. A decision has yet to be made on whether it would be appropriate to make any further payment to compensate for the consequences of the error. We are still working to bring this to a conclusion as soon as possible.

Iraq

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether cluster bombs have been used in Iraq since the declaration of the end of the war. [123604]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 7 July 2003]:* Since 1 May 2003—when it was declared that major combat operations were over—the United Kingdom has used no cluster bombs.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which RAF units remain in the Gulf region in support of Operation Telic; and what plans he has *(a)* to deploy further units and *(b)* to replace those in theatre. [123651]

Mr. Ingram: In support of Operation Telic the United Kingdom currently retains II Squadron (Tornado GR4—replaced by 14 Squadron from 1 August); elements of 10 and 101 Squadrons (VC10); elements of 24 and 30 Squadrons (C130); elements of 22 Squadron (Chinook); elements of 32 Squadron (HS125); elements of 120, 201 and 206 Squadrons (Nimrod MPA); elements of 26 and 34 Squadrons RAF Regiment; Royal Auxiliary Air Force Regiment Squadron (replaced from 15 July by 15 Squadron). Standard practice is to roule Squadrons every two months.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which ships remain in the Gulf region in support of Operation Telic; and what plans he has *(a)* to deploy further units and *(b)* to replace those in theatre. [123652]

Mr. Ingram: In support of Operation Telic the United Kingdom currently has HMS Chatham—to be replaced by HMS Kent on 10 July—and HMS Sutherland, RFA Diligence, RFA Brambleleaf, and HMS Triumph in the Gulf region. Frigates and Destroyers are replaced every four months. RFA crews are rouled on a rolling basis while the ship stays in theatre. HMS Triumph is currently committed to Operation Telic and we will review this deployment when necessary.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made regarding the restoration of law and order in Iraq; what area of Iraq UK troops are responsible for; and how many civil disturbances have occurred since the end of the war. [123839]

Mr. Ingram: Coalition forces hold the maintenance of law and order as a high priority. Coalition forces continue to patrol robustly, often alongside members of around 30,000 Iraqi police who are now operational across the country. Coalition forces are empowered to arrest individuals suspected of criminal offences, and their patrols have had an effect in controlling the lawlessness and looting that in some areas immediately followed the collapse of the Ba'athist regime. United Kingdom forces are currently responsible for security and stability in the southern provinces of Basrah and Maysan. We do not hold figures for the number of civil

disturbances across Iraq, but the Coalition will continue to work hard to reduce such instances, and to improve life for the Iraqi people.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the effects of 24-hour media coverage of the recent military action in Iraq on ensuring that families of casualties are informed before details are made public. [124465]

Mr. Hoon: The introduction of 24-hour media coverage and the development and use of technology have changed the way that wars are reported. During the coalition, broadcasters were able for the first time to report in real time from the battlefield, and incidents which previously might have gone unreported for several hours, were in many cases seen by the embedded journalists and reported back to their news desks. And in some cases, images were broadcast live.

These changes have caused the Ministry of Defence to keep under review its incident reporting and casualty handling procedures. While our primary aim is always to protect the interests of families involved, it was no longer feasible to delay announcing that an incident had occurred until all the next of kin had been informed. Thus, while our first task was always to inform the next of kin of those families affected, we simultaneously released information on incidents, subject to operational security, in order to limit the 'circle of worry' of non-affected families who would be aware from media reporting that an incident had occurred. However, incident and casualty reporting is a very difficult area and all decisions were taken on a case-by-case basis.

We did not publish the names of fatalities until we had confirmation that the next of kin, and in some cases the extended family network, had been informed. Our Casualty staffs worked closely with media staffs to ensure that the families involved were protected from any media intrusion.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the HVM Starstreak system was deployed in Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [111815]

Mr. Ingram: The HVM Starstreak system was deployed to Iraq but was not used. The system has not been tested on operations but has met, in trials, all performance criteria against the original defined user requirements.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many sets of clothing were issued to soldiers serving with Seventh Armoured Brigade in Basra. [112027]

Mr. Ingram: Seven Armoured Brigade have been issued with the following desert combat clothing: 16,578 desert lightweight jackets, 14,623 pairs of trousers, 8,392 hats, 8,556 helmet covers, and 8,014 pairs of desert combat boots, since deploying to Theatre, in addition to the clothing and equipment they were issued with prior to deployment.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the former members of the Iraqi regime who have either surrendered to or been captured by Coalition forces; where they are being held; and whether the British authorities have regular access to those individuals to question them. [114893]

Mr. Ingram: The following list shows the members of the former Iraq regime who have either surrendered or been captured by Coalition Forces as of 6 July 2003. They are being held at Baghdad International Airport and both United Kingdom and United States personnel are conducting a co-ordinated series of interviews with senior officials of Saddam Hussein's former regime.

Abid Hamid Mahmud al-Tikriti
Aziz Salih al-Numan
Muhammad Hamza al-Zubaydi
Kamal Mustafa abdallah Sultan al-Tikriti
Muzahim Sab Hasan al-Tikriti
Ibrahim Ahmad abd al-Sattar Muhammad al-Tikriti
Hamid Raja Shalah al-Tikriti
Latif Nusayyif al-Jasim al-Dulaymi
abd al-Tawab abdullah Mullah al-Huwaysh
Jamal Mustafa abdallah Sultan al-Tikriti
Taha Muhyi al-Din Maruf
Tariq Aziz
Walid Hamid Tawfiq al-Tikriti
Hikmat Mizban Ibrahim al-Azzawi
Ayad Futayyih Khalifa al-Rawi
Zuhayr Talib abd al-Sattar al-Naqib
Amir Hamudi Hasan al-Sadi LTG
Amir Muhammad Rashid al-Tikriti al-Ubaydi
Hussam Muhammad Amin al-Yasin
Muhammed Mahdi al-Salih
Watban Ibrahim Hasan al-Tikriti
Barzan Ibrahim Hasan al-Tikriti
Huda Salih Mehdi Ammash
Samir abd al-Aziz al-Najim
Humam abd al-Khaliq abd al-Ghafur
Sayf al-Din al-Mashhadani
Fadil Mahmud Gharib
Uglah Abid Saqir al-Kubaysi
Ghazi Hammud al-Ubaydi
Adil abdallah Mahdi al-Duri al-Tikriti
Husayn al-Awadi Bg
Sad abd al-Majid al-Faysal.

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in the clearance of unexploded ordnance in Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [116948]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave on 9 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 811W to my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd).

Low Frequency Sonar

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of global research regarding the impact of low frequency active sonar on *(a)* mammals, *(b)* fish and *(c)* humans. [124536]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 July 2003]*: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr. Lewis) on 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 511W. The Ministry of Defence monitors global research to ensure that our

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) are based on the best available information. The EIA undertaken for Sonar 2087, a Low Frequency Active Sonar, covered fish and humans as well as marine mammals. The conclusion of the EIA, that the sonar had the potential to have an adverse impact, applied to each of these categories. The range of mitigation measures proposed will be also capable of being adapted to each.

MARS Project

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is intended that all vessels for the MARS Project will be built in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [103101]

Mr. Ingram: It is our policy that all warships should be built in the UK. The Ministry of Defence is in the early stages of considering how best to meet future requirements for Military Afloat Reach and Sustainability. Once the content of the programme is better defined it will be possible to consider questions such as method of acquisition and location of manufacture. These matters will be clear by the time the Main Gate decision point is reached around the middle of the present decade.

Mazar-e-Sharif

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military staff make up the UK-led provincial reconstruction team in Mazar-e-Sharif. [124912]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* The structure of the UK-led Provincial Reconstruction Team currently deploying to Mazar-e-Sharif is not yet fixed. On current plans, we expect the total number of UK civilian and military personnel eventually deployed to be two and about 50 respectively.

Military Burials

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what grants are available to families of servicemen wishing to give a family member a full military burial. [125620]

Mr. Caplin: Full military burials are organised and arranged by the parent Service of the deceased if requested by their next of kin; in such circumstances, a grant is not paid as the full costs are met by the Department.

Missile Defence Systems

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the United States defence authorities on their proposals to develop missile defence systems; and if he will make a statement. [120530]

Mr. Hoon: Missile defence is an important bilateral topic which regularly features in my discussions with the US Secretary of Defense and others. In addition, the Ministry of Defence keeps in close touch with the US Administration on possible future developments in missile defence.

NATO Reaction Force

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the UK's contribution is to the NATO reaction force; and when he expects this force to be operational. [125609]

Mr. Hoon: The United Kingdom has made it clear that we are keen to make an early and substantial contribution to the NATO Response Force (NRF).

The NRF is planned to reach Initial Operating Capability (IOC) by October 2004 and Full Operating Capability (FOC) no later than October 2006. SACEUR is working towards establishing an interim capability to be ready later this year.

The force generation process begins later this month. I am withholding precise details of the UK and other nations' offers of forces in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Nuclear Weapons

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the *(a)* strategic and *(b)* sub-strategic roles of Trident missiles. [124740]

Mr. Hoon: The Government set out its nuclear deterrence policy in the Strategic Defence Review. I particularly refer my hon. Friend to Chapter Four and Supporting Essay Five.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he plans to conduct negotiations to amend or renew the agreement between Her Majesty's Government and the United States of America for co-operation on the uses of atomic energy for mutual defence purposes, on 3 July 1958, treaty series No. 41 (1958), Command 537; and if he will make a statement; [124744]

(2) if the Government proposes to extend article III bis to the Anglo-American mutual defence agreement on atomic energy matters, of 3 July 1958, treaty series No. 41 (1958), Command 537 when it expires in 2004. [124743]

Mr. Caplin: Discussions are now under way between the United Kingdom and United States Governments on the renewal of the 1958 Agreement For Cooperation on the Uses of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defence Purposes. Subject to the outcome of those discussions, we expect to lay any amendments before the House in accordance with normal procedures for Treaty renewals.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the United States on their proposals to *(a)* reduce the test readiness of their nuclear weapons laboratories and *(b)* fund research into low yield nuclear weapons. [124745]

Mr. Caplin: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has had no such discussions.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 11 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 915W, on scientific exchanges, which United States departments and establishments were visited by AWE personnel; from which departments and

establishments the US visitors to AWE came; and how many *(a)* AWE staff visited the US and *(b)* US officials visited AWE. [124788]

Mr. Caplin: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers I gave him on 9 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 807–08W. 313 AWE personnel visited the United States in 2002 under the auspices of the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement and 485 US personnel visited AWE.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 12 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 1019W, on nuclear weapons, what assessment he has made of when a successor to Trident will be necessary; and what consultation would be undertaken in advance of a decision that a replacement for Trident was necessary. [124863]

Mr. Hoon: There are no current plans for a replacement for Trident, and no decisions on any possible successor system are yet needed.

Private Sector Medical Treatment

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel have been treated, and how much has been spent on treatment, in the private sector since April 2002; and if he will make a statement. [121369]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 30 June 2003]:* According to centrally held records, 3,334 referrals were made to private healthcare providers between April 2002 and June 2003, and expenditure on private healthcare treatment over the same period totalled £3.8 million.

RAF Coltishall

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft movements there were per month at RAF Coltishall in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985, *(c)* 1990, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2002 and *(f)* so far in 2003. [125291]

Mr. Ingram: Historical data about the number of aircraft movements at RAF Coltishall prior to 1997 is not retained by the Department. Figures are available from 1997 onwards, and are listed in the table.

	1997	*2000*	*2002*	*2003*
January	2,215	1,707	2,070	2,163
February	2,189	1,449	1,744	2,477
March	1,534	1,741	2,229	1,931
April	1,663	1,224	2,129	2,374
May	1,743	929	1,837	1,913
June	1,580	1,622	1,848	1,855
July	4,100	2,112	3,416	—
August	507	2,640	1,697	—
September	614	2,456	2,005	—
October	1,560	1,991	3,165	—
November	830	2,078	1,633	—
December	709	1,386	1,302	—
Total	19,244	21,335	25,075	12,713

Service Personnel (NHS Treatment)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel are on NHS waiting lists; how many have had to pay for their own treatment; and if he will make a statement. [123572]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 4 May 2003]:* The Department only maintains records of the numbers of Service personnel awaiting treatment at the NHS hospitals which host the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine (RCDM) and the MOD Hospital Units (MDHUs). Information on the numbers of Service personnel awaiting treatment at other NHS hospitals is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. As at 31 March 2003, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 967 Service personnel awaiting in-patient treatment at the RCDM and MDHUs, plus 1332 awaiting day-case treatment and 3,349 awaiting out-patient appointments.

Service personnel are not required by the Department to pay for their own medical treatment. Information on the numbers who may have chosen to pay for private medical treatment, either themselves or through medical insurance, is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Services Training

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average cost is of *(a)* phase one and *(b)* phase two training per recruit for each of the three services and the Royal Marines. [123946]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 3 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 298–99W, by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence and Minister for Veterans (Dr. Moonie) to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock).

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what improvements are being implemented to improve recreational facilities in each of the three services. [123947]

Mr. Ingram: Trainees already have access to a range of recreational facilities, including playing fields and other sports amenities, and traditional NAAFI facilities, including games and social rooms with TV and video. A number of improvements are being made, including to sporting facilities and the introduction of Quiet Rooms, Juice Bars and Internet Cafes. User views

on recreational facilities are being sought through surveys and focus groups to identify further candidate enhancements.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the average supervisory ratios of staff to trainees in initial training establishments for each of the three services. [123948]

Mr. Ingram: Average figures for the classroom environment vary from 1:3 to 1:40 according to the nature of the training being undertaken. Outside the classroom, ratios vary greatly depending on local circumstances such as age, maturity of recruits, geography of establishments etc, and an average ratio is therefore neither collated nor meaningful. Individual establishments are charged with ensuring that supervisory ratios outside the classroom are appropriate for duty of care in each of these circumstances.

Sigma Aerospace Contracts

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 3 July, ref 123650, how long is left of the unexpired period on the Sigma Aerospace Ltd. contracts *(a)* to repair and overhaul TS6 Hercules engines and *(b)* to provide second line servicing on the Allison engine fitted C130J Hercules. [124928]

Mr. Ingram: The present contract with Sigma Aerospace Ltd. for the repair and overhaul of the Hercules C-130K T56 engines is due to expire on 30 September 2003. The Ministry of Defence has placed an entry in the Defence Contracts Bulletin requesting expressions of interest for the replacement contract.

Servicing of the Hercules C-130J Allison engines is currently undertaken as part of the Contractor Logistics Support (CLS) arrangement with Lockheed Martin, the prime contractor for the Hercules C-130J. This CLS arrangement is due to finish in June 2005.

Submarines

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to deploy low frequency active sonar to detect quiet submarines; and what the timescale is for its deployment. [124534]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 July 2003]*: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 516W, 12 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 47W, to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Baillieston (Mr. Wray) on 13 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 159W. The only low frequency active sonar currently planned for deployment with the Royal Navy is Sonar 2087. It is expected to enter service from 2006 onwards. It will be fitted to the Type 23 Frigates as part of their normal refit programmes.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research he is undertaking into the effects on the UK marine environment of the use of low frequency active sonar. [124535]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 69W, by my right hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Moonie) to the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders). The Ministry of Defence has a programme of research into the effects of active sonar generally, rather than Low Frequency Active Sonar in particular, and this is ongoing. This work is intended to inform Environmental Impact Assessments on marine environments in which sonars might be used by the United Kingdom, rather than in the specific context of UK territorial waters.

Suicide Rates (Female Personnel)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his Answer of 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 467W, on suicide rates, what the estimated rates for female personnel were; and what percentage of female personnel this represents. [125566]

Mr. Caplin: There has been one female suicide/open verdict death over the period 1993–2002, which equates to a rate of 1 per 100,000 strength.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many planning applications have been made to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department. [124811]

Mr. Caplin: Since August 2001 when the current planning regulations on mobile telecommunications masts came into force, there have been 43 applications and seven applications for prior approval to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Ministry of Defence.

War Crimes

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what investigations into war crimes and crimes against humanity have been undertaken by British forces near Basra; and if he will make a statement. [115325]

Mr. Ingram: United Kingdom Forces in Basra are preserving any evidence found of legacy war crimes or crimes against humanity thought to have been carried out by the Iraqi regime for possible future investigations by an appropriate authority. UK military police are currently investigating a number of incidents that occurred during recent operations involving UK forces. It would be inappropriate to comment on on-going investigations.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Angling

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the value of angling to the Northern Ireland economy; how many tourists participated in angling in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years; and what his latest estimate is of how many Northern Ireland residents participate in angling in Northern Ireland. [123469]

Angela Smith: No assessment has been made of the value of angling to the Northern Ireland economy. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board estimates that the value

of trips which included an angling element was £4.88 million in 2002. In the five-year period 1998 to 2002, the estimated numbers of tourists participating in angling in Northern Ireland based on rod licence sales are as follows:

	Number
2002	3,894
2001	3,666
2000	3,855
1999	5,254
1998	4,807

The estimated number of Northern Ireland residents participating in angling in Northern Ireland based on rod licence sales is 23,125. This figure does not include a small number of anglers participating in sea angling as no licence is required for sea fish angling.

Car Accidents (Deaths)

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had with the Chief Constable of the PSNI about the measures to reduce deaths through road traffic accidents *(a)* in Northern Ireland and *(b)* in North Down. [125812]

Angela Smith: In November 2002, I was joined by the Assistant Chief Constable with responsibility for road traffic policing in launching the Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy 2002–12. The strategy provides a major step forward in outlining the partnership approach between the main agencies: Department of the Environment (DOE), the Department for Regional Development (DRD) and Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), in addressing the main causes of death and serious injuries, which are speed, drink-driving and failure to wear seat belts.

Officials in the relevant Departments and agencies, including PSNI, have been liaising closely to implement the objectives outlined in the strategy. The strategy provided for the establishment of a Road Safety Steering Group, which will oversee and monitor progress towards the delivery of the strategic objectives and targets and consider new initiatives. The Steering Group involves senior management in each of the three main organisations responsible for the delivery of the strategy.

Actual delivery of the activities and initiatives set out in the strategy will be co-ordinated by the Road Safety Review Group, which is chaired by a senior official in the DOE and includes representatives from Roads Service and PSNIs Road Policing Development Branch.

Since the launch of the strategy there have been five joint launches involving the DOE and PSNI, including the launch of the new anti-speeding campaign where the Assistant Chief Constable and I reaffirmed our commitment to road safety and to influence positively the attitudes and behaviour of all road users through education and enforcement.

Officials from the DRD Roads Service have regular liaison meetings with PSNI to discuss any relevant issues to do with traffic management and road safety from an engineering perspective. Roads Service officials have also met recently with PSNI to discuss road safety on the A2 Belfast to Bangor road in North Down.

As part of a major initiative on use of fixed and mobile safety cameras throughout Northern Ireland, four sites on the A2 Belfast to Bangor Road have been selected for enforcement by safety cameras and new signing for these sites was erected on 1 July 2003, superseding earlier speed camera signing. This again was undertaken by PSNI in conjunction with Roads Service and was as a result of the close liaison between the two organisations.

The hon. Member may be interested to note that although the number of fatalities (87) to date this year is higher than the comparable period in the last two years, the numbers of killed and seriously injured (KSI), which are the recognised road safety indicators throughout the UK, have shown a steady decline. In the first five months of this year (the last full period for which comparative figures are available) the KSI total is 581 compared with 682 for the same period in 2002 and 701 in 2001.

There will continue to be positive and constructive discussions not only between the DOE, DRD and PSNI, but also with all its partners in road safety to ensure safer roads for everyone in Northern Ireland. However, it is incumbent upon all road users to take personal responsibility for their action when using the roads.

Electoral Identity Card

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of those eligible to vote in each constituency of Northern Ireland have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* received an electoral identity card. [120889]

Mr. Spellar: No record is maintained of applications made for the electoral identity card by constituency because of the validation procedures set up involving the electoral register. All accurate and complete applications, however, will result in the issue of the card. The number of cards issued at 3 July 2003, along with the percentage of the electorate having applied in each of the 18 Northern Ireland constituencies, is as follows:

Constituency	*Number of cards issued*	*Percentage of electorate issued with cards*
Foyle	6,847	10.5
East Londonderry	4,194	7.5
North Antrim	4,921	7.0
East Antrim	3,183	5.7
Mid Ulster	4,318	7.2
West Tyrone	5,165	8.9
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	5,217	8.1
Upper Bann	3,840	5.6
Newry and Armagh	3,887	5.6
South Down	4,175	5.9
Lagan Valley	4,097	6.0
Strangford	3,743	5.6
South Antrim	3,465	5.4
North Down	2,853	5.0
Belfast East	3,555	6.8
Belfast South	3,323	6.5
Belfast West	6,154	12.1
Belfast North	5,545	10.8
Total	78,482	7.1

Post Offices

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the post offices, and their locations, which have been closed permanently in Northern Ireland in each year since March 1998. [125307]

Mr. Timms: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 30 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 75W. This is an operational matter for Post Office Ltd.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many staff in his Department were on long-term sick leave in each of the last five years; [109254]

(2) how many staff in the Department have been on long-term sick leave in each of the last two years. [115857]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The number of staff in the Northern Ireland Office who were on long-term sick absence is as follows:

Long-term sickness absence—Northern Ireland Office staff

	Number
1997–98	[1]__
1998–99	[1]__
1999–2000	[1]__
2000–01	147
2001–02	143

[1] Figures for 1997–98 to 1999–2000 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Long-term sickness absence—Northern Ireland prison civilian staff

	Number
1998	30
1999	33
2000	30
2001	46
2002	46

The Northern Ireland Office considers 20 consecutive days (28 for prison civilian staff) to be long-term absence.

Sick absence statistics for the 11 Departments within the Northern Ireland Administration are analysed by financial year as opposed to calendar year. The information sought is readily available only for the period 1999–2000 to 2001–02.

Long-term sick leave in the NICS is defined as those sick absences lasting more than 20 working days. Published statistics for Northern Ireland Departments for the financial years 2000–01 and 2001–02 are accessible on the Department's website at: www.dfpni.gov.uk.publications

The following table identifies the number of staff who were on long-term sick leave during the period 1999–2000 to 2001–02.

	Number
1999–2000	2,690
2000–01	2,804
2001–02	3,029

The level of sick absence has been a matter of concern over recent years and a range of corporate and departmental initiatives have been, and are being, taken forward to reduce the current levels of sick absence. Northern Ireland Departments have now set individual targets for reduction in sick absence.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Feroz Abbasi/Moazzam Begg

Mr. Cash: To ask the Solicitor-General pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Stone of 10 July 2003, ref 124822, what response she has received from the United States Administration on why Mr. Feroz Abbasi and Mr. Moazzam Begg have been detained; and what discussions she has held with the Crown Prosecution Service on whether the information received is adequate to found a criminal prosecution in the UK against Mr. Abbasi and Mr. Begg. [126038]

The Solicitor-General: The US Administration confirmed to the Attorney-General that its view is that all the detainees in Guantanamo Bay, including Feroz Abbasi and Moazzam Begg, have been detained as enemy combatants under the laws of armed conflict. It is not the policy or practice of the CPS to comment on whether a prosecution is likely to be commenced in individual cases.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Solicitor-General pursuant to the published statement of the Attorney-General immediately prior to the war in Iraq, on legal aspects of military action in Iraq, if she will make a further statement on how the length of the military occupation of Iraq impinges on those legal aspects. [126036]

The Solicitor-General: The written answer given by the Attorney-General on 17 March 2003 in the House of Lords related to the legality of the use of force against Iraq. Since then, the United Nations Security Council has adopted Resolution 1483 of 21 May 2003. This Resolution, together with the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and the Hague Regulations, now governs the conduct of the United Kingdom and the United States as occupying powers in Iraq. The Resolution calls upon the occupying powers to work towards the creation of conditions in which the Iraqi people can freely determine their own political future.

TREASURY

Airport Passenger Tax

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Airport Passenger Tax is designed to produce environmental benefits. [R] [124761]

John Healey: Air passenger duty (APD) was introduced in 1994 as a measure whose principal purpose was to raise revenue from the aviation industry but with the anticipation that there would be environmental benefits through its effect on air traffic volumes.

The Government are currently discussing with stakeholders the most effective economic instruments to ensure the aviation industry takes account of, and where appropriate reduces, its contribution to global warming and local air and noise pollution. A Government discussion document, Aviation and the Environment: using economic instruments, was published in March 2003.

Aviation Tourism

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the balance of payments in aviation tourism was in each of the last three years. [124252]

John Healey: The precise information requested is not collected centrally although "The UK Balance of Payments—The Pink Book 2002" states that the total deficit for all forms of overseas travel (business and tourism, by air, sea and rail) for the years 1999, 2000 and 2001 was £8.87 billion, £10.94 billion and £13.75 billion respectively (page 45). It should be noted, however, that the UK runs a significant surplus in overall services trade.

Page 39 of the Pink Book 2002 states that in 2001, 58 million UK residents travelled abroad and 23 million foreign nationals visited the UK with the comment that

> "the sharp fall in the numbers of overseas visitors to the UK in 2001 is thought to be partly due to events such as the foot and mouth crisis deterring people from travelling to the UK".

Biofuels

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he proposes to take in respect of *(a)* fuel duty rebates and *(b)* other measures to ensure that the UK meets the EU guidelines for biofuel use at the end of (i) 2005 and (ii) 2010. [125854]

John Healey: I refer to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Clark), of 10 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 928W.

Drug Seizures

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many kilograms of *(a)* heroin, *(b)* cocaine and *(c)* cannabis were seized by HM Customs and Excise whilst being imported into the UK in each of the last five years; and what percentage of each substance was seized at the Port of Liverpool. [121623]

Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions in each of the last five years *(a)* firearms, *(b)* drugs and *(c)* other dangerous goods were intercepted at Royal Mail sorting offices in the London area. [124942]

John Healey: For information on HM Customs and Excise's seizures of drugs, firearms and other dangerous goods, I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey on 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 50W. The more detailed information requested is not available; exemption 4 (law enforcement and legal proceedings) of the Open Government Code applies.

Economic Consultancies

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which economic consultancies have been commissioned by HM Treasury in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001, *(c)* 2002 and *(d)* 2003; and in each case what the cost was of each consultancy. [123664]

John Healey: Complete information for all the periods requested could be compiled only at disproportionate cost. The following consultancies have been identified from information readily available:

Taxation of Farming.

Identifying the drivers of regional productivity.

The effects of uncertainty on investment.

Correlation of business cycles in the UK with other major economies.

Shocks that have influenced economic cycles.

Why EU R and D is lower than US levels.

Economic impact of EU enlargement.

Productivity in the EU and the US.

EU/US trade. (Jointly funded study with Dutch Finance Ministry).

Regional Performance.

Analysis for HMT's Productivity in the UK series.

Update the UK's generational accounts.

Britain's relative productivity performance.

New "Green Book" guidance on appraisal and evaluation in central Government.

Relationship between wages, employment and the participation rate.

Team based incentives.

Public service productivity.

Equilibrium exchange rates.

EMU cyclical convergence and shocks.

Exchange rate economics.

Housing market and monetary policy transmissions.

US as a monetary union.

Monetary policy transmission.

Export market performance of OECD countries.

Labour market issues.

Location of financial activity.

Monetary union and trade.

Fiscal stabilisation in EMU.

Impact of EMU on business sectors.

Minimum benchmarks under the EU Treaty and the Stability and Growth Pact.

Policy Frameworks.

Prices and competition in the EU and USA.

Transatlantic Relations (Jointly funded study with the Dutch Finance Ministry).

Trademarks exhaustion.

The specific costs of individual consultancies cannot be disclosed for commercial reasons. Total expenditure on the projects above was £413,000.

EU Advisory Committee

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU advisory committee on value added tax, *(b)* the number of times, and the dates, on which it has met since January 2002, *(c)* the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, *(d)* the decisions it has made since January 2002 and *(e)* the means used to communicate the decisions to the House. [110284]

John Healey: The EU Advisory Committee on value added tax consists of delegates drawn from each of the 15 European member states. The UK is represented by officials from HM Customs and Excise.

The Committee has met six times since January 2002, on 20 March 2002, 19 June 2002, 20 November 2002, 8 January 2003, 10 March 2003 and 4 June 2003.

The agenda items considered by the Committee related to questions on the application of the Community provisions on value added tax. The Committee has no legal power to take decisions. The Committee's rôle is to examine the application of the Community provisions on value added tax, and to serve as a forum for an exchange of views in order to reach guidelines on a uniform application of those provisions. Some provisions of EU VAT law require member states to consult the Committee before acting.

EU Committees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU committee on excise duties, *(b)* the number of times, and the dates, on which it has met since January 2002, *(c)* the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, *(d)* the decisions it has made since January 2002 and *(e)* the means used to communicate the decisions to the House. [110283]

John Healey: The EU Committee on Excise Duties consists of delegates drawn from each of the 15 European member states. The UK is represented by officials from HM Customs and Excise.

The Committee has met six times since January 2002. On 16/17 May 2002, 7/8 November 2002 and 3/4 April 2003, it considered questions relating to the interpretation and application of Community provisions on excise duties and procedures. Meetings on 7 October 2002,28/29 November 2002 and 16 December 2002 dealt specifically with the development of the EU computerised system for movement and control of goods subject to excise duty (EMCS).

Under its powers in accordance with Council Decision 1999/468/EEC, the Committee approved a minor amendment to an existing Commission Decision on the product to be used as a fiscal marker for gas oils and kerosene, as well as the EMCS project management plan. Additionally, the Committee agreed an administrative arrangement for the operation of the electronic early warning information exchange system for intra-EU movements of excise goods.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament is ensured by the regular EU scrutiny process documents which fall within the Scrutiny Terms of Reference are deposited within Parliament along with an Explanatory Memorandum for examination by the Scrutiny Committees.

Together with member states, the Commission has been conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of Comitology Committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

The Working Group on the Friends of Comitology is meeting later this month to discuss proposals for interim reform.

The Commission is obliged to publish an annual report on the working of the Committees. The latest report (Com (2002)733 final, dated 13/12/02) has been published and was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 10 January 2003.

The UK Government have also encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU Customs Code Committee on counterfeit and pirated goods, the number of times and the dates on which it has met since January 2002, the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, the decisions it has made since January 2002 and the means used to communicate these decisions to the House. [110503]

John Healey: The Customs Code Committee on counterfeit and pirated goods, consists of delegates drawn from each of the 15 member states. The UK Government are represented by officials from HM Customs and Excise. Since January 2002 there have been four meetings of the Customs Code Committee (Counterfeiting)—6 March, 3 September, 4 October 2002 and 3 March 2003.

The Customs Code Committee (Counterfeiting) discusses matters relating to intellectual property rights and in particular measures concerning the entry into the community, export, re-export from the community of goods infringing certain intellectual property rights. The main item under discussion by the Committee during the period in question has been a proposal to overhaul these measures and this has now been completed.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament is ensured by the regular EU scrutiny process: documents which fall within the scrutiny terms of reference are deposited within Parliament along with an explanatory memorandum for examination by the Scrutiny Committees.

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Financial Services (Fines)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the fines levied against financial services companies in each year since the creation of the Financial Services Authority by *(a)* company, *(b)* amount and *(c)* reason for fine; and if he will make a statement on the use of the money raised from these fines. [125831]

Mr. Boateng: The FSA is a private company, which operates independently from the Government. It has the power to develop its own rules, which have the force of law. and determines, the level of lines that are levied when those rules are breeched.

The Financial Services and Markets Act (Schedule 1) stipulates that any amounts received by the FSA through the levy of fines should be applied for the benefit of authorised persons.

Information on fines levied by the FSA is available from their website.

Incineration Tax

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how much annual revenue would be raised from a tax on the incineration of municipal waste at £35 per tonne for *(a)* all existing municipal waste incinerators and *(b)* all municipal waste incinerators for which planning applications have been made. [125128]

John Healey: Given current levels of waste disposed of by incineration, a tax on the incineration of municipal waste of £35 per tonne would be expected to raise about £90 million per annum. However, it is unlikely that this level of revenue would be generated, as a tax on incineration at such a rate would be expected to lead to more waste going to alternatives such as landfill. The current level of landfill tax is £14 per tonne rising to £15 next year, and will be increased by at least £3 per tonne each year from 2005–06 until it reaches a rate of £35 per tonne in the medium to long term. These increases will help encourage reductions in the quantities of waste disposed of to landfill. No estimate has been made of the projected levels of incineration which would result from the building of all municipal waste incinerators for which planning applications have been made.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions his Department has held with representatives of local government on the potential for an incineration tax to support the waste hierarchy; and if he will make a statement. [126158]

John Healey: The Government have had discussions with representatives of Local Government on a range of waste related issues, including incineration. The Government have also commissioned a review of the environmental and health effects of all waste management and disposal options and aims to report on the findings later in the year.

Meat Imports

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made since the new arrangements have been in place to intercept illegal importation of meats at ports. [125624]

John Healey: Since Customs took over responsibility for tackling illegal inputs of meat products from third countries from April 11, they have undertaken a number of initiatives designed to help them tackle this problem more effectively. These include: a recruitment drive for new anti-smuggling teams and dog handlers; re-deploying existing anti-smuggling staff to target these illegal importations; transferring "meat" dogs and their handlers from Defra to Customs; instituting a programme of awareness meetings with senior Government officials from targeted risk countries, undertaking a series of training seminars for Customs staff and developing new publicity posters and leaflets for ports and airports in the UK.

Money Laundering

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the amount of money that has been laundered through British businesses in each year since 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [124733]

Mr. Boateng: The true scale of money laundered in the UK cannot be measured directly. Global money laundering has been estimated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as the equivalent of between 2 per cent. and 5 per cent. of world input.

The UK has recently taken steps to strengthen its anti-money laundering regime, including through the Proceeds of Crime Act, the money laundering provisions of which came into force earlier this year. The Government intends to lay Regulations before Parliament shortly that will implement the provisions of the 2nd EU Money Laundering Directive.

Mortgages

Mr. Syms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of monetary policy in economies with housing markets characterised by high levels of fixed rate mortgages. [125047]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor has asked David Miles, Professor of Finance at Imperial College, to undertake a review of the UK's fixed rate mortgage market.

This will involve an examination of whether there has been any market failure that has held back the market for fixed and long-term fixed rate mortgages and a consideration of associated opportunities, risks and potential costs.

Professor Miles will deliver an interim report by autumn and a comprehensive report and recommendations to the Chancellor by Budget 2004.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with members of the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee concerning *(a)* the effectiveness of monetary policy if the ratio of fixed to variable rate mortgages were to rise and *(b)* the likely level of interest rates corresponding to an annual inflation target of 2 per cent. on the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices. [125048]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor regularly meets with the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss a wide range of issues. The Treasury representative to the MFC and other Treasury officials also regularly discuss economic issues with counterparts in the Bank of England.

The Chancellor has asked David Miles, Professor of Finance at Imperial College, to undertake a review of the UK's fixed rate mortgage market. This will involve an examination of whether there has been any market failure that has held back the market for fixed and long-term fixed rate mortgages and a consideration of associated opportunities, risks and potential costs. Professor Miles will deliver an interim report by autumn and a comprehensive report and recommendations to the Chancellor by Budget 2004.

The inflation target is 2.5 per cent. for RPIX inflation. In his statement on EMU on 9 June, which he reaffirmed on Thursday, 10 July, the Chancellor said that, subject to confirmation at the time of the pre-Budget Report, he intended to change the inflation target to one set on the consumer prices definition at that time.

ONS (Information)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the categories of information and statistics sought by the Office for National Statistics for business and individuals by way of requirements for information. [126072]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Dr. Cable, dated 15 July 2003:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the list of categories of information and statistics sought by the Office for National Statistics for business and individuals by way of requirements for information. (126072)

I have arranged for details of the data requested from businesses to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

For individuals and households, the Social Survey Division Annual Report gives the information requested. The latest published version available is for 2001/02, a copy of which can also be found in the House of Commons Library.

The 2002/03 version is currently in draft and is expected to be published at the end of August 2003. A copy of the report will be placed in the House of Commons Library once published.

Staff Costs

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff the Department and each agency and non-departmental public body for which the Department is responsible had in each year since 1997; and what the cost of those staff was in each of those years. [122250]

John Healey: Information on the number and cost of staff from the financial year 1998–99 can be found in the following 2003 Spring Departmental Reports:

Department	*Command number*	*Reference*
HM Customs & Excise	5,924	Tables 5 and 6
Inland Revenue	5,925	Annex 3 and Table 5
HM Treasury[1]	5,922	Annex B5 and B6
Office of National Statistics	5,931	Tables 2 & 4
Government Actuary's Department	5,923	Tables 6 and 7

[1] Includes the Office of Government Commerce (core) and Debt Management Office

Prior to 1998–99 the requirement was to supply figures for "running costs" only which included the paybill figures. Consequently, the information requested for 1997–98 is not available in a standard format but can be found in the following publications:

Department	*Staff numbers*	*Staff costs (£ million)*
HM Customs and Excise	Spring Report 2000 (Cm 4616)	
Inland Revenue	Spring Report 2002 (Cm 5428)	1,174
	See accompanying booklet "The Government's Expenditure Plans 2002–04"	
HM Treasury	2002 Departmental Report (Cm 5425)	2000 Departmental Report (Cm 4615)
Office of National Statistics	2003 Departmental Report (Cm 5931)	68
Government Actuary's Department	91	4

OGCbuying.solutions is an Executive Agency of the Office of Government Commerce and came into operation on 1 April 2001. For the year ended 31 March 2002, the agency had 177 employees and the cost of their employment including National Insurance and superannuation was £5.1 million.

Staff numbers and costs for the other Chancellor's departments are as follows.

The valuation office

Financial year	*Staff numbers*	*Staff costs (£ million)*[1]
1997–98	4,346	103
1998–99	4,063	101
1999–2000	4,016	103
2000–01	3,948	103
2001–02	3,814	103

[1] Valuation Office staff costs do not include early departure costs

The Royal Mint

Financial year	*Staff numbers*	*Staff costs (£ million)*
1997–98	1,014	24
1998–99	994	24
1999–2000	1,171	28
2000–01	1,138	31
2001–02	1,008	28

National savings and investments

Financial year	*Staff numbers*	*Staff costs (£ million)*
1997–98	4,241	73
1998–99	4,009	75
1999–2000	121	6
2000–01	122	6
2001–02	118	6

In April 1999, following a competitive tendering exercise, the operations part of National Savings and Investments was outsourced to Siemens Business Services.

Staff numbers in the tables above are based upon Civil Service Full Time Equivalents and Casual staff years but do not include overtime staff year effort.

Staff costs relate to paybill including early departure costs, unless otherwise specified.

Final staffing figures for 2002–03 are not yet available.

Taxes and Benefits

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to the document The effects of taxes and benefits on household income 2001–02, what percentage of gross incomes was paid in indirect taxes by income decile for *(a)* retired and *(b)* non retired households; and if he will make a statement. [124448]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Matthew Taylor, dated 15 July 2003:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking for the percentage of gross incomes paid in indirect taxes by income decile for *(a)* retired and *(b)* non retired households. (124448)

Estimates for indirect taxes and income are based on the analysis "The effects of taxes and benefits on household income 2001–02" produced by the ONS and published on the National Statistics website on April 11th 2003 and in Economic Trends in the May 2003 edition. The analysis can be obtained from the House of Commons library. This includes measures of income inequality for the United Kingdom as a whole based on data from the Expenditure and Food Survey (EPS). Due to the sampling variability of each measure, sample sizes are only sufficient to allow a breakdown to be given by quintiles for the ratio of indirect taxes to gross income, and not by decile.

A retired household in the analysis of "The effects of taxes and benefits on household income 2001–02" is defined as one where the combined income of 'retired' members amounts to at least half the total gross income of the household. A 'retired' person is defined as anyone in the EPS survey who is over minimum NI pension age and is 'unoccupied' or 'sick or injured but not intending to seek work,' or who describes themselves as 'retired'.

The following table shows the estimated indirect taxes as a proportion of gross income for retired and non-retired households in the UK for each income quintile where households are ranked by equivalised disposable income. The table also shows the lower bands of the equivalised disposable income quintiles, which have been calculated separately for the retired and non retired households. For example, the lower bound of the 2nd quintile for the retired households is the income below which one fifth of all retired households are estimated to lie and similarly for the non-retired households. Since indirect tax tends to be a higher proportion of income for lower income bands, using different quintile points for retired and non-retired households affects the relative percentages for each quintile.

Estimates of indirect taxes are imputed using household expenditure given in the EPS. One drawback of comparing the incidence of indirect taxes on households at different levels of income is that, by whatever measure used, on average, recorded expenditure exceeds income apparently available for it by significant amounts at the bottom of the distribution.

Income and expenditure data recorded in the EFS are not fully compatible because they are recorded in different ways. Indeed, measured expenditure exceeds measured income for households in the lower half of the distribution.

There are a number of possible explanations for this. Some households with low incomes may draw on their savings or borrow in order to finance their expenditure. In these cases, expenditure is not being met from current income. Some types of receipts are not included as income in the EFS e.g. inheritance and severance payments.

In some cases, the information given on expenditure is not consistent with that on income received, possibly because of timing differences.

Indirect taxes as a percentage of gross income for retired and non-retired households, 2001–02

United Kingdom

Household type		*Boundary point between equivalised disposable income quintiles (£ per year)*	*Indirect taxes (as percentage of gross income)*
Retired	Bottom	—	26.2
	2nd	9,026	19.1
	3rd	11,354	18.1
	4th	13,878	17.3
	Top	18,465	13.0
Average for all retired households			16.7
Non-retired	Bottom		30.4
	2nd	11,604	19.5
	3rd	17,038	17.1
	4th	22,711	14.1
	Top	31,321	9.9
Average for all non-retired households			14.6

Source:
Office for National Statistics, based on the analysis 'The effects of taxes and benefits on household income', published on the ONS website and in Economic Trends No. 594 May 2003.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to the document "The effects of taxes and benefits on household income 2001–02", (1) what percentage of gross incomes was paid in

customs duties by income decile for *(a)* retired and *(b)* non-retired households; and if he will make a statement; [124450]

(2) what percentage of gross incomes was paid in stamp duties on house purchases by income decile for *(a)* retired and *(b)* non retired households; and if he will make a statement. [124451]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Matthew Taylor, dated 15 July 2003:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions asking for the percentage of gross incomes paid in Customs duties (24) and additionally in stamp duties (25) by income decile for *(a)* retired and *(b)* non retired households. (124450, 124451)

Estimates for indirect taxes and income are based on the analysis "The effects of taxes and benefits on household income 2001–02" produced by the ONS and published on the National Statistics website on April 11th 2003 and in Economic Trends in the May 2003 edition. The analysis can be obtained from the House of Commons Library. This includes measures of income inequality for the United Kingdom as a whole based on data from the Expenditure and Food Survey (EPS). Due to the sampling variability of each measure, sample sizes are only sufficient to allow a breakdown to be given by quintiles for the ratio of customs or stamp duties to gross income, and not by decile.

A retired household is defined as one where the combined income of 'retired' members amounts to at least half the total gross income of the household. A 'retired' person is defined as anyone in the EPS survey who describes themselves as 'retired' or anyone over minimum NI pension age describing themselves as 'unoccupied' or 'sick or injured but not intending to seek work.'

Customs duties are estimated from customs receipts and are allocated to households in proportion to expenditure data recorded in the EPS. Stamp duty on house purchases for owner-occupier households has been estimated in proportion to the hypothetical duty payable on buying their current dwelling (estimated from EPS data) multiplied by the probability of a household of that type moving in a given year (estimated from the General Household Survey).

The following table shows the estimated Customs duties and stamp duties paid as a proportion of gross income for retired and non-retired households in the UK for each income quintile where households are ranked by equivalised disposable income. The table also shows the lower bounds of the equivalised disposable income quintiles, which have been calculated separately for the retired and non retired households. For example, the lower bound of the 2nd quintile for the retired households is the income below which one fifth of all retired households are estimated to lie and similarly for the non-retired households.

Since indirect taxes tend to be a higher proportion of income for lower income bands, using different quintile points for retired and non-retired households affects the relative percentages for each quintile.

One drawback of comparing the incidence of indirect taxes on households at different levels of income is that, by whatever measure used, on average, recorded expenditure exceeds income apparently available for it by significant amounts at the bottom of the distribution. Income and expenditure data recorded in the EPS are not fully compatible because they are recorded in different ways. Indeed, measured expenditure exceeds measured income for households in the lower half of the distribution.

There are a number of possible explanations for this. Some households with low incomes may draw on their savings or borrow in order to finance their expenditure. In these cases, expenditure is not being met from current income. Some types of receipts are not included as income in the EPS e.g. inheritance and severance payments. In some cases, the information given on expenditure is not consistent with that on income received, possibly because of timing differences.

Customs and stamp duties as a percentage of gross income for retired and non-retired households, 2001–02

United Kingdom

Household type	*Quintile*	*Boundary point between equivalised disposable income quintiles (£ per year)*	*Customs duties (as percentage of gross income)*	*Stamp duty on house purchase (as percentage of gross income)*
Retired	Bottom		0.2	0.4
		9,026		
	2nd		0.2	0.2
		11,354		
	3rd		0.2	0.2
		13,878		
	4th		0.1	0.2
		18,465		
	Top		0.1	0.3
Average for all retired households			0.1	0.3
Non-retired	Bottom		0.2	0.4
		11,604		
	2nd		0.1	0.3
		17,038		
	3rd		0.1	0.3
		22,711		
	4th		0.1	0.3
		31,321		
	Top		0.1	0.3
Average for all non-retired households			0.1	0.3

Source:
Office for National Statistics, based on the analysis 'The effects of taxes and benefits on household income published on the ONS website and in Economic Trends No. 594 May 2003

Tobacco/Alcohol Duty

Mr. Swire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money was generated through tax on *(a)* tobacco and *(b)* alcohol since 1997. [125143]

John Healey: Excise Duty and estimated VAT receipts for tobacco and alcohol products are:

Tobacco and alcohol receipts

£ million

	Tobacco			*Alcohol*		
	Duty	*Estimated VAT*	*Estimated total tobacco revenue*	*Duty*	*Estimated VAT*	*Estimated total alcohol revenue*
1997–98	8,356	1,750	10,105	5,742	4,430	10,170
1998–99	8,207	1,770	9,980	5,966	4,620	10,590
1999–2000	5,684	1,805	7,490	6,429	4,940	11,370
2000–01	7,648	1,765	9,415	6,663	5,060	11,720
2001–02	7,755	1,760	9,940	6,955	5,290	12,250
2002–03[1]	8,055	[2]—	[2]—	7,300	[2]—	[2]—

[1] Provisional
[2] Estimated VAT figures for 2002–03 are still being processed
Note:
Due to rounding there may be an apparent discrepancy between the total and the sum of its constituent parts.

This information can be found in the HM Customs and Excise July 2003 'Tobacco Factsheet' and 'Alcohol Factsheet' Pages 1, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

Unemployment (Merseyside)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs have been created in Merseyside in the last five years. [124203]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply

Letter from Len Cook to Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas, dated 15 July 2003:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of jobs that have been created in the last five years in Merseyside. (124203)

There are no figures for jobs created but an indication can be obtained by comparing the annual surveys of employee jobs. The Annual Business Inquiry (ABI) gives an estimate of the number of employee jobs in December of each year; the latest year for which figures are available is 2001.

The ABI was preceded, prior to 1998, by the Annual Employment Survey. This inquiry had a different structure to the ABI and so direct comparisons cannot be made between the AES and ABI at a regional level.

Between 1998 and 2001 the ABI data shows a net increase in the number of employee jobs in Merseyside of 21,000.

Water Charges (Household Income)

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the value is by income decile of the water charges element of the local taxes line of the average income tax tables contained within the document, The effects of taxes and benefits on household income 2001–02. [125193]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Norman Baker, dated 15 July 2003

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking what the value is by income decile of the water charges element of local taxes. (125193)

Estimates for local taxes, which includes water charges, are based on the analysis "The effects of taxes and benefits on household income 2001–02" produced by the ONS and published on the National Statistics website on April 11th 2003 and in Economic Trends in the May 2003 edition. The analysis can be obtained from the House of Commons library. This includes measures of income inequality for the United Kingdom as a whole based on data from the Expenditure and Food Survey (EPS).

The following table shows the estimated average water and sewerage charges paid in 2001–02 for all households in the United Kingdom and by each equivalised disposable income decile. Payments for water and sewerage charges are not collected separately within the EPS and only a combined estimate can be given.

Water charges element of local taxes by equivalised disposable income decile, 2001–02

United Kingdom

Decile	*Boundary point between equivalised disposable income deciles (£ per year)*	*Water charges paid (£ per year)*
Bottom	8,271	221
2nd	10,412	225
3rd	12,456	211
4th	14,751	226
5th	17,249	226
6th	20,085	229
7th	23,831	230
8th	28,640	238
9th	37,544	241
Top	—	249
Average for all households	—	230

Source:
Office for National Statistics, based on the analysis 'The effects of taxes and benefits on household income', published on the ONS website and in Economic Trends No. 594 May 2003.

Working Family Tax Credit

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average time taken to provide full responses to correspondence from Right honourable and honourable Members in respect of working family tax credit applications to the Inland Revenue has been; and if he will make a statement. [123370]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue's Tax Credit Office does not keep information about the average time taken to answer right hon. and hon. Members' letters about the working families tax credit.

The TCO aims to answer 80 per cent. of all letters, including those from right hon. and hon. Members, within 15 working days of receipt. In the year to 31 March 2003 the TCO exceeded this target and answered 84 per cent. of all letters within 15 working days of receipt. They will measure their performance in the current financial year and report against their aim in due course.

World Bank

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the UK policy was in respect of US attempts to block proposals to increase the influence of developing countries within the World Bank; and if he will make a statement. [123402]

John Healey: The UK Government are committed to making the voice of developing countries in the World Bank and the IMF more effective. In the 2000 Department for International Development (DfID) White Paper, HMG committed to

> "work with others to build a stronger, more open and accountable international system, in which poor people and countries have a more effective voice."

DfID have lead responsibility for issues related to the World Bank, and the Treasury has been working closely with them on this issue.

The Development Committee at the spring meetings of the World Bank and the IMF in April 2003 requested the boards of the bank and fund to

> "consider and elaborate upon options with a potential for broad support, taking account of shareholder and institutional implications"

for discussion at the next meeting of the Development Committee.

An issues paper which sets out the various options in this area is now being discussed by the board of the World Bank. The US are one of 24 members of the board, and have made a statement outlining their view. The UK Government position remains that further action is required to enhance the voice of developing countries in the World Bank and IMF, and we will continue to support discussions in this area with the aim of reaching agreement on institutional and structural measures to enhance that voice.

HEALTH

Alcoholism

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the Government's strategic plan on combating alcoholism. [121260]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit are undertaking a project to develop an alcohol harm reduction strategy for England. In my previous role as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health I was the Sponsor Minister for the project and I am pleased to continue in this role.

The cross-governmental alcohol harm reduction strategy for England will be set out in a report planned for publication in autumn 2003.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the costs of health screening for asylum seekers; and what tests health screening would include. [125958]

Dr. Ladyman: The Government's aim is for all asylum seekers to receive initial health assessments in induction centres prior to dispersal. This is to address public health concerns and to start treating any health problems. Each assessment takes the form of a general medical check and recording of health history, along with screening for tuberculosis. Referrals for other tests can be made if appropriate, including HIV.

When the induction centre network is at full capacity, annual costs for health assessments will be approximately £3 million, based on current intake. There will though be resultant savings in dispersal areas.

Blood Donor Records

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce a national database of blood donors which includes details of individuals' medical records. [124881]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The National Blood Service has no plans to introduce a national database of blood donors which includes details of individuals' medical records.

Blood Transfusions

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the National Blood Service education programme for transfusion medicine will be published. [123385]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The National Blood Service (NBS) has no plans to publish an education programme for transfusion medicine.

The NBS provides training for scientific and medical staff in hospitals and has recently identified the need to train hospital nurses and midwives in various aspects of transfusion medicine. NBS is currently discussing these training requirements, which will include training on the appropriate use of blood.

The NBS is also establishing a network of transfusion liaison nurses who will facilitate training in collaboration with similar staff in national health service trusts. This initiative is part of the NBS response to Health Circular HSC 2002/009, "Better Blood Transfusion—Appropriate Use of Blood", which is available at: www.doh.gov.uk/publications/coinh.html

Cancer Nursing

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what calculations his Department has made of *(a)* current and *(b)* projected demand for cancer nursing within the NHS. [123248]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Cancer networks should work in partnership with workforce development confederations and strategic health authorities to put in place a sustainable process to assess, plan and review their workforce needs and the education and training of all staff linked to local and national priorities for cancer.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS cancer nurse posts are *(a)* pump-primed and *(b)* part-funded by the voluntary sector; and if he will list the voluntary sector organisations. [123251]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Marie Curie and Macmillan Cancer Care both pump prime cancer nurse specialist posts. Information on the number of posts is not collected centrally by the Department of Health.

Cancer Services

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what written directions his Department has given to the strategic health authorities to ensure the methods for calculating and presenting cancer allocation data in local delivery plans are transparent and nationally consistent; and when these directions were given. [124346]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Strategic health authorities were sent guidance at the end of April 2003 detailing information needed to monitor the cancer investment element of local delivery plans. A copy of the guidance has been placed in the Library.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to strengthen the rights and protection of residents in elderly persons' care homes from eviction; [125634]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the impact on life expectancy of residents of *(a)* care home closure and *(b)* eviction from a care home. [125635]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department of Health recognises that moving between care homes can be difficult and stressful for any long-term resident, particularly vulnerable older people. Such moves, including ones made as a result of care home closures, should be handled as sensitively and appropriately as possible. Proper arrangements should be made for the safe and satisfactory transfer of all residents to other suitable homes. There should be adequate time for this to be done, in a way that allows both residents and their relatives a choice in where they are to move to, and which creates the minimum possible discomfort to all concerned.

For each resident supported under section 21 of the National Assistance Act 1948, councils should agree a contract with independent care homes that includes a statement of terms and conditions covering matters such as fees and period of notice. This is in accordance with Standard 2 of the National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People. Councils should play a part in facilitating transfers from one home to another as and when appropriate. With respect to supported residents who are transferring, councils should ensure that residents' needs are re-assessed and alternative and appropriate accommodation is arranged promptly, with due regard to the Choice of Accommodation Directions 1992.

With respect to residents who fund their own care, Standard 2 of the National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People also states that contracts agreed by the residents and care homes should cover fees payable, the period of notice and other matters. If, when homes close or residents transfer for other reasons, self-funding residents require advice on other homes to enter and how to go about it, councils should provide this advice. If self-funding residents lack the capacity to make their own arrangements, following an assessment of their needs, councils should take over the arrangements.

Carers

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of ill and disabled people who are dependent on care from more than one carer or from a changing pattern of carers. [125960]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not centrally available.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the scale of fees to be paid in different cases and different classes of case will be under clause 83(3) of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill. [122931]

Dr. Ladyman: It would be for the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) to determine any scale of fees to be paid under clause 84 (formerly 83) of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill. Before making any such provision, CSCI must consult such persons as appear to it to be appropriate.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria the Government have set for the right of entry to be considered necessary or expedient under clause 86(1) of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill; and if personal records inspected under the right of entry will be protected under the Data Protection Act 1998 under clause 85(1)*(a)*. [122953]

Dr. Ladyman: The Commission for Social Care Inspection will determine what conditions will be considered necessary or expedient under clause 87(1) (formerly clause 86(1)).

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the CSCI will be required to give notice where it requires a person to provide it with any information, records or other items under clause 87(1) of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill; where a person is required to provide the CSCI with any information or records (including personal records), whether these will be protected under the Data Protection Act; and where the CSCI requires a person to provide it with information, records and other items, whether the Government will put in place safeguards to ensure that only records, with particular reference to those held on computer, which are relevant to an investigation are requested and that an individual's right to privacy is protected. [122965]

Dr. Ladyman: We expect that Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) will normally obtain information by agreement. Where it exercises the power in clause 88 (formerly clause 87) to require the provision of information or documents, we expect that it will normally do so in writing.

Individuals' rights to privacy will be protected by the common law duty of confidentiality and the Data Protection Act 1998. Under clause 88 (1)(b), CSCI may only request information and documents which it considers necessary or expedient to have for the purposes of chapter 5.

Fluoridation

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to hold a referendum before new schemes for fluoridation of the public water supply are implemented. [124192]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Amendments to the Water Bill agreed on 9 July in the Other Place provide for regulations to be made on the local consultations that strategic health authorities will be required to undertake before making any arrangements with a water undertaker to have their water fluoridated. In drafting

the regulations we shall carefully consider the range of options available for assessing public opinion. This House will debate the Water Bill in due course.

General Practitioners

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners working in the *(a)* Taunton Deane, *(b)* South Somerset, *(c)* Mendip, *(d)* Somerset Coastal and *(e)* North Devon primary care trusts are aged (i) under 40, (ii) 40 to 55, (iii) 55 to 65 and (iv) over 65. [124434]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is shown in the table.

General medical practitioners[1] by age-band for specified primary care trusts—England, as at 30 September 2002

Number (headcount)

	Primary care trusts				
	Mendip	*North Devon*	*Somerset Coast*	*South Somerset*	*Taunton Deane*
PCT code	5FX	5FQ	5FW	5K1	5K2
All practitioners	87	125	112	108	81
of which					
under 40	29	44	31	31	35
40 to 54	45	65	70	64	41
55 to 64	13	16	11	11	5
65+	0	0	0	2	0
of which					
Unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[2]	63	105	94	92	74
of which					
Under 40	15	28	22	21	30
40 to 54	38	61	63	59	39
55 to 64	10	16	9	10	5
65+	—	—	—	2	—

[1] All practitioners includes UPEs, restricted principals, assistants, GP registrars, salaried doctors (Para 52 SFA), PMS other and GP retainers.
[2] UPEs include GMS unrestricted principles, PMS contracted GPs and PMS salaried.
Source:
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

Genetically Modified Foods

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the lifting of the EU ban on biotech foods, and the move to replace the ban with rules for clear labelling of all genetically modified products. [124820]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There is no ban in the European Union on foods developed using biotechnology. Measures have been in place for a number of years to permit the placing of such foods on the market subject to rigorous safety assessment procedures and appropriate labelling.

Agreement to further EU measures tightening up the legal requirements for the approval and labelling of genetically modified food and feed and for the traceability of genetically modified organisms is likely to be reached by September.

Hepatitis

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the incidence of *(a)* hepatitis A, *(b)* hepatitis B and *(c)* hepatitis C was in each year since 1997. [122448]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information available on the incidence of hepatitis A and B in England from 1997 to 2002 is shown in the table.

Laboratory reports of cases of acute hepatitis A and B in England reported to the Health Protection Agency Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre, 1997–2002

	Hepatitis A	*Hepatitis B*
1997	1,272	621
1998	1,058	806
1999	1,355	687
2000	1,010	652
2001	773	526
2002	[1]1,326	[1]738

[1] Provisional data

Laboratory reports of antibody to hepatitis C do not distinguish between incident (new), chronic (long-term) and previous resolved infections and most often identify individuals with chronic hepatitis C infection. Therefore, such data cannot be used to estimate the incidence of hepatitis C infection.

Hospices

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the funding arrangements for *(a)* children's and *(b)* adult hospices; and if he will make a statement. [122683]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 30 June 2003]:* National health service primary care trusts (PCTs) play a pivotal role in funding services for their resident population, including hospice care. Voluntary healthcare providers, such as hospices, are important players and partners in the planning and development of

these services. They should engage fully with PCTs in discussing the level and type of provision which addresses local needs.

The New Opportunities Fund has allocated £48 million to support over 130 palliative care projects for children. Successful bids have largely been predicated on partnership working between the NHS and service providers. The national service framework for children, which is currently being developed, will set the standards for service providers in this area.

The NHS Cancer Plan pledged to increase NHS investment in adult specialist palliative care, including hospices, by £50 million per year by 2004. Ministers have set up a central budget of £50 million per annum for specialist palliative care for the three years from 2003–04. Funding will be allocated by a joint NHS/voluntary sector national partnership group, which will approve local specialist palliative care plans.

In-patient Survey

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the results of the NHS inpatients survey; what plans he has to make changes in policy as a result of the survey; and if he will make a statement. [124794]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The results of the 2002 patient surveys have been compiled into comprehensive national reports, which have been made available widely within the Department. The Department is using these results to monitor progress in delivering its Public Service Agreement target to,'enhance accountability to patients and the public and secure sustained national improvements in patient experience, as measured by independently validated surveys'.

Mental Health

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on mental health provision in *(a)* England and *(b)* Essex in each year since 1990. [124870]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The table shows details of expenditure on Mental Health Services from 1992–93 to 2001–02. Data for 1990–92 is not available.

It is not possible to provide figures by English county, so the table shows total expenditure by health authorities and primary care trusts in England and for health authority areas within Essex.

Mental health services expenditure

£000

	Essex health authorities area	*England*
1992–93	54,043	2,331,497
1993–94	67,995	2,350,548
1994–95	71,537	2,371,146
1995–96	79,234	2,511,431
1996–97	80,113	2,648,191
1997–98	81,352	2,767,036
1998–99	89,255	2,925,934
1999–2000	111,580	3,408,660
2000–01	122,568	3,951,618

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many in-patient beds were available for mental health patients in *(a)* England and *(b)* Essex in each year since 1980. [124871]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information on the number of in-patient beds between 1980 and 2001–02 for England is shown in the table. Information by geographical area is not available.

Average daily number of available beds, by sector; NHS Trusts in England

Available beds

	Mental illness
1980	87,396
1981	85,436
1982	83,831
1983	81,786
1984	78,911
1985	75,866
1986	72,402
1987–88	67,122
1988–89	63,012
1989–90	59,288
1990–91	55,239
1991–92	50,278
1992–93	47,308
1993–94	43,532
1994–95	41,827
1995–96	39,477
1996–97	37,640
1997–98	36,601
1998–99	35,692
1999–00	34,173
2000–01	34,214
2001–02	32,783

Source:
SH3/KH03

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the NHS budget has been spent on mental health care in each year since 1980. [124872]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The table shows how much was spent on mental health care as a percentage of total hospital and community health service expenditure from 1980 to the present.

	Percentage of total HCHS expenditure
1979–80	11.12
1980–81	11.25
1981–82	11.27
1982–83	11.25
1983–84	11.19
1984–85	11.26
1985–86	11.21
1986–87	11.14
1987–88	11.55
1988–89[1]	12.40
1989–90	12.24
1990–91	11.98
1991–92	11.49
1992–93	11.47
1993–94	10.90
1994–95	10.59
1995–96	10.55
1996–97[2]	12.09
1997–98	12.14
1998–99	11.97
1999–2000[3]	12.34
2000–01	12.71

[1] Data analysis method changed to show more detailed community health care expenditure.
[2] Data collection method changed to give better analysis of NHS expenditure.
[3] Data collection method changed to include secondary healthcare expenditure from primary care groups and trusts.

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate has been made of the proportion of the population of England which will require mental health treatment during their lives. [124874]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Decisions about mental health treatment and care are taken on the basis of an individualised assessment of needs by the responsible clinical team in consultation with the patient, in the light of the evidence base, the resources available, and in the context of national guidance.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for compiling, analysing and disseminating information relating to UK economic, social and demographic statistics. Their report, 'Psychiatric morbidity among adults living in private households, 2000', is available on the website at www.statistics.gov.uk. Surveys of children's mental health (1999) and the mental health needs amongst people in prison (1997) have also been undertaken by ONS and further information is available from them.

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he will take to improve fast track intervention for those suffering from acute mental health problems. [124876]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department has a public service agreement to reduce the duration of untreated psychosis to a service median of less than three months (individual maximum less than six months) and provide support for the first three years for all young people who develop a first episode of psychosis by 2004. This target is being accomplished by the creation of 50 early intervention teams across the country.

There are currently 24 early intervention teams in England which provide quick diagnosis of the first onset of a psychotic disorder and appropriate treatment including intensive support in the early years for people aged between 14 and 35.

Also, NHS Direct's call handling capacity will more than double to 16 million calls annually by 2006, backed by a funding increase to £182 million. Improved 24-hour access to clinical advice by telephone from home will cut the burden on general practitioners and the emergency services, including for people with mental health problems, who can obtain rapid advice from trained nurses.

As part of the mental health modernisation agenda, steps are being taken to increase capacity in both community and hospital based provision that will help provide quicker and more convenient services. Establishing crisis resolution services and more hospital beds as well as improving access to child and adolescent mental health services by 10 per cent. each year across the service according to agreed local priorities are among these steps.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of unmet need with respect to child and adolescent mental health services, broken down by *(a)* region and *(b)* strategic health authority; and if he will make a statement. [124921]

Dr. Ladyman: The information on which to base such an assessment is not collected centrally. Needs assessment is the responsibility of local agencies as part of their service planning activity. Systematic mapping of local child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) provision across England was launched last year and it is intended to repeat this annually. This will provide detailed information on service provision, service activity levels and expenditure on CAMHS by provider trust and by local authority and primary care trust commissioners. Data currently available can be found on the dedicated website at www.dur.ac.uk/service.mapping/CAMH/.

The Government's strategy for the development of CAMHS, initiated in 1999, has made significant progress in improving the overall quality and accessibility of local services for children and young people with mental health problems. Our current central investment programme of £250 million over the coming three years aims to help secure comprehensive CAMHS in all areas by 2006, in line with the objectives contained in "Improvement, Expansion, Reform the Priorities and Planning Framework 2003–06" published by the Department in October 2002.

Midwives

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the ratio of midwives in post to the total number of births was in 2002 in each NHS maternity unit. [123474]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on the ratio of deliveries to midwives by hospital in 2001–02 has been placed in the Library.

MRI Scanners

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to replace the MRI scanners used in Shropshire NHS trusts. [125147]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* The magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanners at the Princess Royal Hospital National Health Service Trust and the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust fit within the criteria for replacement indicated in my right hon. Friend, the then Secretary of State's announcement on the 22 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 47WS. It is proposed that the scanner at the Princess Royal Hospital NHS Trust will be replaced when the current service agreement expires in April 2004. It is proposed to replace the other scanner during 2005–06

The Royal Shrewsbury Hospital NHS Trust has recently been awarded an additional MRI scanner from a "New Opportunities Fund initiative". This is likely to be installed before the end of 2004.

Myositis

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make drugs used to treat patients with myositis available on free prescriptions. [125201]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Prescription charges are not payable by myositis patients who are aged under 16 or 60 or over, who are (or their partner is) receiving income support or income based jobseekers allowance, or who are named on a national health service tax credit exemption certificate. Other patients on a low income may receive help under the NHS low income scheme. We have no plans to change the current charging arrangements.

By using a prescription prepayment certificate, no one who has to pay need pay more than £32.90 for four months, or £90.40 for 12 months, for all NHS medication they are prescribed.

National Care Standards Commission

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints have been made to the National Care Standards Commission from parents of children at *(a)* boarding schools belonging to the Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference and the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools and *(b)* other boarding schools. [125178]

Dr. Ladyman: The National Care Standards Commission has received six complaints about Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools or Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference schools and six complaints about other boarding schools.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost of dental services which are free at the point of use. [124628]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Gross spend on general dental services (GDS), that is, payments to dentists covering both their income and expenses, was £1.7 billion in 2002–03 in England. Adults who pay charges for their dental treatment contributed about £0.5 billion, leaving a net £1.2 billion contributed by Government.

National health service resources are also spent on dental services delivered in the community dental service (CDS) and the hospital dental service. Estimate of the cost of the CDS is £150 million. There is no similar estimate for the cost of hospital dental services.

NICE

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the considerations of the Joint Planning Group meeting, involving his Department and NICE, held on 13 March 2003. [123378]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Joint Planning Group is an advisory group which formulates internal advice to Ministers. As such, its minutes are not published.

Older People

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general hospitals have failed to introduce plans for a specialist stroke unit as referred to on page 172 of the National Service Framework for Older People. [124586]

Dr. Ladyman: A monitoring exercise, conducted at the end of 2002, suggested that 83 per cent. of hospitals have plans in place to have a specialist stroke service by April 2004.

The Department of Health will be monitoring formally the overall stroke milestone in April 2004, as this is included as one of the key targets in Improvement, Expansion and Reform, the priorities and planning framework for 2003–06. It is now for strategic health authorities to plan, deliver and monitor progress locally on the other stroke milestones in the national service framework.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his assessment is of how successfully implemented the medicine reviews are for older people as referred to on page 172 of the National Service Framework for Older People. [124587]

Dr. Ladyman: A monitoring exercise, conducted at the end of 2002 through the strategic health authorities (SHAs), suggested that 29 per cent. of practices had mechanisms in place to review medicines prescribed to those aged 75 and over, in accordance with the national service framework (NSF) for older people.

The Department of Health will be monitoring formally the key targets in Improvement, Expansion and Reform, the priorities and planning framework for 2003–06. It is now for SHAs to plan, deliver and monitor progress locally on the other milestones in the NSF.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints have been received by NHS organisations from older people and carers under systems set up under the National Standards Framework for Older People. [124924]

Dr. Ladyman: It is for local National Health Service organisations to analyse and report on complaints received from older people and their carers. This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many risk management procedures under the National Standards Framework for Older People are *(a)* in development and *(b)* planned but not in place in providers of health and social care. [124926]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not collected centrally. The Department of Health will be monitoring formally the overall falls milestone of integrated health and social care falls services by April 2005 as this is included as one of the key targets in Improvement, Expansion and Reform, the priorities and planning framework for 2003–2006. It is now for strategic health authorities to plan, deliver and monitor progress locally on the other falls milestones in the national service framework.

Ophthalmic Laser Treatment

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on Early Day Motion 1494 (Ophthalmic Laser Treatment). [125024]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Royal College of Ophthalmologists recommends that only qualified ophthalmologists should be able to undertake laser eye surgery and that they should have undertaken additional specialist training in refractive surgery.

Establishments where Class 4 laser treatment (the type used in laser eye surgery) is provided are required to be registered with the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) as independent hospitals, under the Care Standards Act 2000. Establishments are required to meet certain standards, amongst which is the requirement to ensure that all staff using lasers and intense pulsed light sources use them only for treatments for which they have been trained and, where appropriate, hold qualifications and that they receive regular training. Independent hospitals are inspected by the NCSC at least once every 12 months.

Prescription Charges

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost of abolishing prescription charges in England. [125416]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We estimate that the loss of prescription charge income in England would be around £446 million in 2003–04. Additionally, there could be significant additional costs to the drugs bill if people who currently pay charges sought prescriptions for medicines and other items which they currently purchase.

Primary Care Trusts

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 173W, on primary care trusts, if he will list the average distance from target in each primary care trust, in each year since 1997. [124254]

Mr. Hutton: Information on primary care trust distances from targets for 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06 have been placed in the Library. Prior to 2003–04 allocations were made to health authorities.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to publish this year's star ratings with the local context of each primary care trust. [124391]

Mr. Hutton: The next set of national health service performance (star) ratings will be published this summer by the Commission for Health Improvement, the independent regulator for NHS performance. The performance ratings system provides a high level overview of NHS organisations' performance across a wide range of measures.

Registered Nurses

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of registered nurses were aged *(a)* 20–30, *(b)* 30–40, *(c)* 40–50, *(d)* 50–60 and *(e)* over 60, in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [123927]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of qualified nurses employed in the national health service by age-band is shown in the table.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council publishes an annual statistical analysis of the register, which includes a breakdown by age of registered nurses. This can be obtained at www.nmc-uk.org.

NHS Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, by age-band, in England as at 30 September each year

Headcount by age-band

	All ages	*Under 21*	*21–30*	*30–40*	*40–50*	*50–60*	*Over 60*	*Unknown*
2002	346,537	124	48,650	105,237	101,468	53,884	5,509	31,665
2001	330,535	149	47,021	103,469	93,766	50,704	4,961	30,465
2000	316,752	131	45,036	103,275	87,725	48,475	4,725	27,385
1999	310,142	167	45,277	104,054	82,164	45,871	4,570	28,039
1998	304,563	168	47,470	105,037	77,119	43,233	4,251	27,285
1997	300,467	535	50,007	103,327	73,427	41,276	4,593	27,302
1996	301,253	208	55,397	104,541	73,096	39,358	4,133	24,520
1995	298,650	291	58,022	101,842	72,345	39,101	4,542	22,507
1994	289,284	163	60,456	97,649	70,161	38,135	4,301	18,419
1993	293,379	63	64,440	94,255	70,565	38,881	4,560	20,615

Percentage of nurses in each age-band

	All ages	*Under 21*	*21–30*	*30–40*	*40–50*	*50–60*	*Over 60*
2002	100.0	0.0	15.5	33.4	32.2	17.1	1.7
2001	100.0	0.0	15.7	34.5	31.2	16.9	1.7
2000	100.0	0.0	15.6	35.7	30.3	16.8	1.6
1999	100.0	0.1	16.0	36.9	29.1	16.3	1.6
1998	100.0	0.1	17.1	37.9	27.8	15.6	1.5
1997	100.0	0.2	18.3	37.8	26.9	15.1	1.7
1996	100.0	0.1	20.0	37.8	26.4	14.2	1.5
1995	100.0	0.1	21.0	36.9	26.2	14.2	1.6
1994	100.0	0.1	22.3	36.1	25.9	14.1	1.6
1993	100.0	0.0	23.6	34.6	25.9	14.3	1.7

Note:
Percentages have been calculated using only nurses whose age is known.
Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Salt

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to bring forward legislation on the reduction of the salt content of processed food if the food industry does not introduce voluntary measures. [122803]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are no plans to do so at present. The Department of Health and the Food Standards Agency have been in ongoing discussions with food manufacturers and retailers about the levels of salt in specific categories of processed foods, reductions that have been made in the past and the opportunities for further reductions. The principal bodies that have been involved are the Food and Drink Federation, the British Retail Consortium, the British Frozen Food Federation and the Joint Food Service Industry Group.

All of the organisations have approached discussions constructively, with a focus on verifying and recognising salt reductions already achieved by industry and investigating the scope for achieving further reductions.

School Health Checks

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Department for Education and Skills on introducing annual health checks for schoolchildren up to the age of 16. [124483]

Dr. Ladyman: Ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health regularly meet ministerial colleagues from the Department for Education and Skills, where various issues are discussed. Our discussions often include the best way to provide health care, to support health promotional activity for schoolchildren and young people and to ensure access to any health checks that are necessary for their well being.

Sport

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many staff are employed in his Department to promote sports participation, as part of his public health role; [123909]

(2) how much is spent by his Department to promote the public health benefits of participation in sport and physical exercise. [123910]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department of Health is committed to developing policies that provide people with the skills, information and support to make and sustain healthy lifestyle choices.

The Department of Health funds a physical activity programme to:

- support the delivery of Planning and Priorities Framework targets and national service framework milestones;
- work with other government departments and stakeholders to enhance opportunities for physical activity; and
- develop and communicate the evidence base for physical activity.

It is not possible to provide an overall figure for Department of Health spending to promote the public health benefits of physical activity and exercise, since the amount spent by primary care trusts (PCTs) on the promotion of physical activity from the devolved Department of Health budgets varies in each PCT.

Department of Health staff work across topic areas within the whole range of work covering cardio-vascular disease and cancer prevention (which includes promotion of physical activity) according to needs and we do not enumerate specific people on the topic of sports participation. The Department of Health employs a number of organisations and individuals on an ad hoc contractual basis to assist the department in the delivery of specific work items, and also receives support and advice on the evidence base for successful interventions from the Health Development Agency.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to tackle obesity levels through increasing participation in sport and physical activity; and if he will make a statement. [123911]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Considerable action is being taken across Government to tackle obesity levels, especially through increasing physical activity and improving diet.

The Government have recently set a challenging target for 70 per cent. of the population to be active by 2020. To ensure that there is a co-ordinated and strategic approach to the planning and delivery of sport and physical activity across a diverse range of sectors—such as transport, countryside management and town planning—and in response to this target, a Sport and Physical Activity Board (SPAB) has been established. The SPAB, jointly led by the Department of Health and Department of Culture, Media and Sport and supported by a dedicated delivery team, met for the first time on 8 July 2003.

Another key project in our programme of work are the local exercise action pilots (LEAPs), which we jointly fund with Sport England and the Countryside Agency. LEAPs will test the effectiveness of primary care trust-led interventions to increase access and levels of physical activity in communities based in neighbourhood renewal areas. Involving a range of partners, the activities range from walking, cycling and swimming, to clinical-based programmes that are focusing on diabetes and weight management.

Stroke Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals caring for stroke have not established clinical audit systems to ensure delivery of Royal College of Physicians clinical guidelines for stroke care. [124589]

Dr. Ladyman: In 2001, the Third National Sentinel Audit of Stroke, carried out by the Clinical Effectiveness and Evaluation Unit of the Royal College of Physicians and led by the Intercollegiate Working Party for Stroke, gave a detailed picture of the way hospitals provide care for stroke patients. The results of this study were published in July 2002.

In the 2001 audit, 98 per cent. of eligible acute trusts submitted clinical data, demonstrating delivery of the clinical guidelines. The next National Sentinel Audit of Stroke is expected to take place in April 2004.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Staff

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many staff the Department and each agency and non-departmental public body for which it is responsible has; and what their annual cost will be. [122272]

Mr. Lammy: Data on staffing levels in the Civil Service are collected from Departments and agencies twice-yearly, in April and October. Headline figures are published under National Statistics guidelines via a press notice. Those for October 2002 were published on 27 February 2003. A copy of the press notice, accompanying media brief and supporting tables is available on the world wide web at: www.civil-service.gov.uk/statistics Copies of these documents are also placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

More detailed information on the Civil Service is published annually in "Civil Service Statistics", copies of which are laid in the Libraries of both Houses. The last edition, based on April 2001 data, was published in June 2002. The next edition, based on April 2002 data, is due to be published at the end of July 2003.

The Cabinet Office publishes information on non-departmental public bodies in its annual publication, "Public Bodies". The information includes details of the number of staff employed by each NDPB at 31 March each year. "Public Bodies 2002" was published in January 2003. Copies of "Public Bodies", published each year since 1997, are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Department for Constitutional Affairs publishes information on staff numbers and costs in the "Departmental Report"; the last report for 2002–03 was published in June 2003.

Each non-departmental public body for which the Department is responsible publishes its own accounts and annual report.

These reports are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

General Elections

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what steps the Government have taken to increase the turnout at general elections. [124995]

Mr. Leslie: This Government have introduced a number of measures aimed at encouraging participation in elections. We have made it easier to register to vote and to cast a vote. We are, with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, continuing to expand the programme of electoral pilot schemes to test innovative methods of voting at local elections. We have announced our intention, subject to parliamentary approval, to hold next year's European parliamentary, local and GLA elections on the same day, so that voters will only need to turn out once, rather than twice within a short period. All these measures are designed to increase flexibility and convenience for voters and thus encourage greater turnout. In addition, we introduced legislation to set up the independent Electoral Commission. The Commission has a duty to educate and inform the public about the importance of participation in the democratic process and a remit to recommend ways in which our electoral arrangements can be improved. We will consider carefully any recommendations made by the Electoral Commission which may have an impact on electoral turnout.

House of Lords Reform

Tom Cox: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many letters his Department has received from the general public, giving their views on the appointment of people's peers. [123971]

Mr. Leslie: The Department has received several hundred pieces of correspondence on aspects of House of Lords reform from the general public. Around 20 of these have focused exclusively on the appointment of cross-bench life peers following the recommendations of the House of Lords Appointments Commission.

Magistrates

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many magistrates *(a)* joined and *(b)* retired from the bench in each year since 1997. [124914]

Mr. Leslie: The table sets out the information for England and Wales, including the Duchy of Lancaster.

	Total appointed[1]	*Retirements at age 70*	*Resignations and removals*
1997	1,573	606	879
1998	1,609	623	1,004
1999	1,743	559	1,058
1 January to 31 March 2000	180	133	405
2000–01	1,618	590	1,709
2001–02	1,786	638	1,302
2002–03	1,623	593	1,181

[1] Excludes re-appointments.

Office of Supervision of Solicitors

Mr. Watts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what plans he has to review the effectiveness of the Office of Supervision of Solicitors. [125210]

Mr. Lammy: We are considering the performance of the Office in the light of the Legal Service Ombudsman's Annual Report 2002–03 and the Government's undertaking to review the regulatory framework for legal services about which we hope to make an announcement soon.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Cash: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs (1) whether he will *(a)* amend and *(b)* adopt any of the existing Lord Chancellor's Department public service agreements; [124861]

(2) when he will introduce new public service agreements. [124862]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 127W.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Adviser Discretion Fund

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many individuals have been given financial help to purchase a car through the Adviser Discretion Fund. [121218]

Mr. Browne: Detailed information about specific goods and services purchased with help from the Adviser Discretion Fund is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Agency Workers

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the measures in place in respect of *(a)* jobseekers allowance, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* other benefits to meet the needs of agency workers who are regularly unemployed for short periods of time. [124021]

Mr. Browne: Agency workers can experience intermittent periods of employment and unemployment. The fear of finding themselves involved in a lengthy claim process and without an income during these periods of unemployment may have, in the past, discouraged many people from taking this type of work.

In order to assist people in these circumstances we introduced Rapid Reclaim to ensure a smooth transition from work to benefit. Rapid Reclaim is available to customers who find themselves having to reclaim Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance, Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit within 12 weeks of having previously claimed the same benefit. The Rapid Reclaim process allows Decision Makers to use information provided for the previous claim alongside a shorter claim form, completed by the customer, that captures any changes that may have occurred during the break in their claim. This speeds up the data collection process and so reduces the time from making a claim to receiving the first payment.

Rapid Reclaim is making it easier for people to take up work, that may be only short-term or through an agency, as it reduces the fear that there will be a delay in the resumption of benefits during the periods that they are off work.

Benefit Payments

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of the reminder letter that is sent to people who have not replied to the initial letter on automated credit transfer. [114371]

Mr. Pond: Example copies of the reminder letters sent to child benefit, state pension and benefit customers who have not responded to an initial letter inviting them to transfer to Direct Payment will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the exceptions service being designed for those customers who will not be transferring to direct payment; and when he expects to make available the criteria by which customers will qualify for the service. [124018]

Mr. Pond: Our aim is to have an exceptions service ready from October 2004. There are now a number of easy to operate accounts available, many of which can be accessed at Post Office branches, so our expectation is that this service will be available for those who are genuinely unable to open or operate any type of bank, building society or Post Office account.

Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applications were made for social fund *(a)* community care grants, *(b)* budgeting loans and *(c)* crisis loans in each of the last 12 months; and how many of those applications were successful, broken down by category. [123324]

Mr. Pond: The available information is in the tables.

Community care grant—applications and initial awards

Date	*Number of applications*	*Number of initial awards*
June 2002	41,600	17,400
July 2002	53,600	22,200
August 2002	47,500	19,200
September 2002	49,300	20,700
October 2002	54,800	23,000
November 2002	53,300	22,400
December 2002	39,500	17,600
January 2003	48,000	20,200
February 2003	49,000	19,800
March 2003	51,100	20,000
April 2003	46,200	19,900
May 2003	46,400	21,200

Budgeting loan—applications and initial awards

Date	*Number of applications*	*Number of initial awards*
June 2002	124,300	84,900
July 2002	151,400	106,800
August 2002	133,600	93,800
September 2002	142,700	101,200
October 2002	176,600	122,200
November 2002	193,900	140,200
December 2002	118,400	103,700
January 2003	133,400	80,400
February 2003	136,000	95,700
March 2003	148,000	104,900
April 2003	135,400	95,400
May 2003	140,200	102,700

Crisis loan—applications and initial awards

Date	*Number of applications*	*Number of initial awards*
June 2002	106,000	81,100
July 2002	123,600	94,700
August 2002	117,700	90,200
September 2002	111,900	85,900
October 2002	121,600	92,800
November 2002	109,600	83,100
December 2002	98,000	75,600
January 2003	126,000	97,600
February 2003	112,700	86,700
March 2003	114,700	88,100

Crisis loan—applications and initial awards

Date	*Number of applications*	*Number of initial awards*
April 2003	108,300	84,200
May 2003	110,700	87,700

Notes:

1. Available data on the numbers of awards made following review do not differentiate between awards that were initially refused and those where an award was increased on review. To avoid double counting, the tables show the number of initial awards only.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 100.
3. The number of awards made in a month do not necessarily relate to applications made in that month.

Source:

DWP Social Fund Policy, Budget and Management Information System.

Benefits Consultancies

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action the Government have taken to regulate independent benefits consultancies. [122443]

Mr. Pond: Independent benefits consultancies are not subject to regulation by this Department.

The best source of information about entitlement to state pensions and benefits is the Department's own staff. We publicise contact information widely, including details of local offices and specialist help-lines.

Independent advice is also widely available free of charge through organisations affiliated to the Federation of Independent Advice Centres, Citizens Advice Bureaux and disability organisations.

We are also working with local authorities and organisations that represent disabled people to ensure that the right information gets to claimants. Our aim is to work with these partners who are best placed to target potential benefits customers in an individual and focused way.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many new entrants to the Civil Service were employed in his Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 or over. [119814]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right. hon Friend the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Mr. Alexander) on 24 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 657–59W.

Community Care Grants

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applications were made for community care grants as a result of domestic violence in each year since 1998; how many *(a)* were successful and *(b)* failed; and if he will make a statement. [125740]

Mr. Pond: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her on 28 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 76W.

Crisis and Interim Payments

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions under what criteria the Department and its agencies authorise crisis and interim payments to those in need while benefit applications are processed. [124617]

Mr. Pond: Interim payments are discretionary payments on account of benefit made to avoid hardship where the Decision Maker is satisfied that the basic conditions of entitlement for the benefit are met. Interim payments can be made in the following circumstances:

1. Where a benefit claim has been made but cannot immediately be determined and the delay is not the fault of the customer;
2. In an emergency. This covers a variety of different situations from civil emergencies to industrial action;
3. Where a claim has not been made in the correct manner but it is not the fault of the customer, for example because the claim form has been completed incorrectly by a visiting officer; and
4. While an appeal is ongoing but the customer clearly has some residual entitlement to benefit.

Interim payments follow the same payment cycles and periods as the main benefit being claimed and are not made before the person's first benefit pay-day. The amount of any payment is recoverable from the main benefit when it is awarded.

Social fund crisis loans can be made to help with the day-to-day living expenses of people awaiting a first payment of benefit which is paid in arrears. Any crisis loan made under these circumstances will cover the recipient's needs until their first benefit pay-day, following which full or interim payments of benefit can be made.

Disability Benefits

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action is being taken better to estimate the take-up of disability living allowance. [124641]

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to commission research into the take-up of disability benefits. [124793]

Maria Eagle: Entitlement to disability living allowance (DLA) and attendance allowance (AA) can only be reliably established after an actual claim has been made and the care and mobility needs of the customer are assessed. There is no data available about who might be entitled to either DLA or AA if they were to make a claim. This means that currently we cannot reliably calculate the number of people receiving the benefits as a proportion of the overall eligible population.

However, in the five years to November 2002, the number of people receiving DLA increased by 24 per cent. and by 6.1 per cent. in the last 12 months alone. For AA the increases are 9.6 per cent. and 3 per cent. respectively.

The Department is taking steps to improve the take-up of the benefits in a targeted and well directed way and will continue to work more closely with partners, such as local authorities and welfare rights organisations who are better able to identify potential disability benefits claimants in an individual and focused way.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the expected *(a)* average and *(b)* total expected cost to small businesses employing fewer than 15 people is from the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations 2003; [124736]

(2) how many small businesses employing fewer than 15 people are expected to be affected by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations 2003; [124737]

(3) how many representations her Department has had from small businesses employing fewer than 15 people regarding the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations 2003 *(a)* prior and *(b)* subsequent to their being passed; and what proportion of those representations expressed concern about a potentially adverse impact of the regulations; [124738]

(4) how many disabled employees are expected to be affected by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations 2003; [124739]

(5) what representations he has received from organisations representing small and medium sized enterprises on the costs of compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations 2003; and if he will make a statement. [125587]

Maria Eagle: The Regulatory Impact Assessment on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations 2003, which is available in the Library, estimates that the average cost for small businesses with one to 15 employees of removing the small firms exemption in the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is £5.50, although many small employers will have no costs at all. The total cost to these small businesses will be about £6 million. Of this, £3.9 million is a one-off cost while £2.1 million is a recurring cost, and includes £0.7 million for recruitment. This does not take into account the many benefits that employers can gain from employing and retaining disabled people such as access to a wide pool of applicants, retention of skills and knowledge and better motivation more generally among the workforce.

There are around 1,087,000 businesses with between one and 14 employees. Within these businesses, there are around 382,000 disabled employees who will be protected from discrimination by the DDA's employment provisions as a result of the inclusion of small employers. Other provisions in the Regulations will end a number of other employment and occupational exclusions such as the police, fire-fighters and partners in business partnerships. These measures are expected to bring an additional 218,000 disabled workers within scope of the DDA. Other provisions in the Regulations applying to organisations of all sizes could affect all of the 2,243,000 disabled workers in GB (Winter 2002 Labour Force Survey).

We consulted on draft regulations to implement the sexual orientation, religion and belief and disability provisions of the Article 13 Employment Directive in our 2002 document "Equality and Diversity—the way ahead". Of the 172 respondents who replied on issues specifically concerning the disability provisions, only 2 identified themselves as a private organisation employing one to 14 employees; the vast majority of replies were from representative bodies, disability organisations, public bodies and voluntary organisations. Neither of those respondents commented on a potential adverse impact of the disability regulations.

The Federation of small businesses responded to the consultation but did not comment on compliance costs. Other respondents representing employers, such as the Confederation of British Industry and the Institute of Directors, may have taken account of views from small and medium-sized employers in submitting their replies but it is not possible to measure the extent to which their replies were informed by members with fewer than 15 employees. The majority of such responses concerned the operation of the regulations themselves. However, the IoD questioned some of the assumptions made by Government in estimating the overall costs of implementing the Directive. There have been no representations from small employers or their representative bodies on the disability regulations since they were approved by Parliament.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how his Department are assisting tourism businesses in becoming informed about the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [124759]

Maria Eagle: The Department is currently undertaking a campaign to raise awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) among all types of businesses, including those in the tourism industry. As Minister for Disabled People, I am undertaking a series of regional visits which highlight disability issues and remind employers and service providers of their duties under the Act, and these have been supported by radio advertising and press articles.

On 15 May 2003, we launched two major elements of this campaign; an information pack, aimed particularly at small and medium-sized enterprises. The pack contains advisory leaflets for employers and service providers, together with a video entitled 'Act Now—the DDA and Your Business'. This video provides information about the duties that employers and service providers have under the Act. It shows practical examples of what some companies have done to improve access for their disabled workers and customers and the 'Access All Areas' award which aims to recognise and congratulate small organisations that have made imaginative changes to the way they provide their services so that disabled people can use them. Details of the award and an entry form are available on the website www.disability.gov.uk and are included in the information pack, which is available to any business free of charge.

The Department has undertaken a mailshot of the information packs to business organisations such as Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, CBI Regional Offices, and local Businesslink offices. We have liaised with VisitBritain which has publicised the award on its website and in its email newsletter which reaches 200,000 tourism businesses. The Tourism Skills Network has also advertised the award on its website.

In addition, the Department sponsors, and is continuing to work with, the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), to promote a greater awareness and understanding of the rights of disabled people. The DRC provides advice via its helpline, to employers, service providers and members of the public about rights and duties under the DDA.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport provides funding for England's 9 Regional Tourist Boards (RTBs), and one function of the RTBs is to interpret and communicate the impact of legislation which applies to the tourism sector—this includes the DDA.

E-government

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what organisations he has consulted to meet his Department's commitment to develop an online web based retirement planner; and when that planner will be available to the public. [122267]

Malcolm Wicks: The consultation programme for the Green Paper "Simplicity, security and choice: working and saving for retirement," Cm 5677, was the largest we have undertaken on pensions. More than 800 consultation responses were received. We also met around 2,000 people including individuals and those representing a wide range of organisations taking part in 35 consultation events of various forms. Nearly 150 people contributed to this discussion on our departmental website.

There were a limited number of specific references to the online retirement planner within the consultation responses. Those that did respond were in favour of the proposal.

The Department has also carried out specific consultation with representatives from consumer bodies, industry trade bodies and pension product providers. In particular, with:

Consumers Association;

Financial Services Authority (FSA);

Association of British Insurers (ABI);

Pension Product Providers, including AXA Sun Life, Legal and General, Norwich Union, Prudential, Scottish Equitable and Standard Life; and

EMAP, an employer

We are currently finalising our plans for the web-based retirement planner in response to the Green Paper consultation exercise.

Employment Assistance

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to assist those for whom a move to new employment would impose severe problems of cash flow. [125375]

Mr. Browne: Making the move from benefit into employment can be worrying. In recognition of this a package of measures has been developed, designed to provide real support for people making this transition and give them confidence that they can take up work. These measures include Job Grant, Lone Parents' Run-On, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Extended Payments, Mortgage Interest Run-On, the Adviser Discretion Fund, Social Fund Crisis Loans and the New Tax Credits. In addition we have announced further plans to financially assist people during the transition from benefit to work.

From April 2004 we will be extending the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Extended Payments to people claiming Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance, making it easier for people on these benefits to manage the first few weeks in work. At the same time we will be extending the £11.90 Housing Benefit earnings disregard to people working 16 hours a week and who are receiving or are entitled to Working Tax Credit. This disregard is currently only available to those working 30 hours or more a week and who receiving, or are entitled to, Working Tax Credit.

From October 2004 we will be introducing a unified, more streamlined and easier to understand Job Grant that will also replace the Lone Parents' Benefit Run-On. The new Job Grant will have two rates; one for people with, and another for those without, children. It will, for the first time, be available to partners of benefit claimants who are taking up work and taking the household off benefit. Finally we will also be piloting a new in-work credit for lone parents, also from October 2004.

These measures will help people financially during the difficult period between the last payment of benefit and the first payment of wages.

Energy-efficient Electrical Appliances

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to encourage the use of social fund grants to provide energy efficient electrical appliances. [120750]

Mr. Pond: We believe that people should, as far as possible, be responsible for managing their own money. People who are awarded a social fund payment are, like other consumers, free to choose the goods they purchase. This includes deciding whether to purchase energy efficient electrical appliances.

Exceptions Service

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the statement made by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) of 9 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 310WH, if he will make a statement on the timetable for the establishment of the exceptions service. [125962]

Mr. Pond: Our aim is to have an exceptions service ready from October 2004.

Gangmasters

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the enforcement of the obligations of gangmasters to ensure that the staff they provide to British farmers and growers *(a)* are aware of the health and safety requirements of their work and *(b)* hold appropriate qualifications for any specialised tasks they may need to perform. [124888]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* Employers, including gangmasters have responsibility for the health and safety of their employees. Enforcement of health and safety law in the agriculture sector rests with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and a summary of HSE's enforcement and other activities can be found in the Health and Safety Commission's annual report available from the House library. HSE is involved with other Government agencies and departments in the Gangmaster Working Group's activities to co-ordinate enforcement activity against gangmasters acting illegally.

Government Initiatives

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the research that has been conducted into *(a)* employment zones, *(b)* new deal for communities and *(c)* action teams; if he will publish these documents; and if he will make a statement. [122465]

Mr. Browne: The following research has been conducted into Employment Zones and Action Teams:

'Employment Zones: A study of local delivery agents and case studies', Working Age Evaluation Series 124, July 2002

'Personal Advisers in New Deal 25 plus and Employment Zones', Working Age Evaluation Series 139, August 2002

'Evaluation of Action Teams for Jobs' Working Age Evaluation 114, April 2002

All of these reports are available in the Library. Future evaluation reports on these programmes will be placed in the Library when published.

The evaluation of the New Deal for Communities partnerships is just moving into its second year. A first report on this evaluation will be published later this year by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit. This report will be placed in the Library.

Jobcentre Plus

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* client-based targets and *(b)* weighted points target system Jobcentre Plus has for placing people who are on (i) jobseekers allowance, (ii) income support for lone parents, (iii) incapacity benefit and (iv) each of the new deal programmes; what the level of performance has been against each of these targets and the weighted points targets in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [124538]

Mr. Browne: Jobcentre Plus was created in April 2002, bringing together the Employment Service and those parts of the Benefits Agency that delivered services to working age people. That was the first time that an explicit weighted target was used for job entries.

The targets for Jobcentre Plus are set out in the Jobcentre Plus Business Plan and the Performance and Resources Agreement (PRA) which are available in the Library. Performance against the 2002/03 targets will be included in the Jobcentre Plus Annual Report and Accounts, which will be published in the near future.

Job entry performance against targets prior to 2002 can be found in the Employment Service Annual Reports and Accounts, copies of which are in the Library.

Jobseeker's Allowance (North Yorkshire)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when persons whose jobseekers allowance claims are refused are informed of the reasons for the refusal of their claim; and if he will make a statement on the appeal procedures applicable in such cases. [124024]

Mr. Pond: Once a claim for jobseekers allowance is assessed, a letter is sent to inform the person making the claim of the entitlement decision and the reasons for that decision. This letter also sets out the action the customer can take if they either do not understand or are unhappy with the decision. They can ask for further explanation of the decision, ask for the decision to be reconsidered or appeal against the decision to an independent tribunal.

Full details on these procedures can be found in leaflet GL24: If you think our decision is wrong. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people were claiming jobseeker's allowance in North Yorkshire on *(a)* 1 April 2000 and *(b)* 1 April 2003. [124427]

Mr. Pond: The information is in the table.

Jobseeker's allowance claimants in the county of North Yorkshire

	Number
April 2000	6,635
April 2003	4,932

Note:
Figures are from a count of people claiming benefit at 13 April 2000 and 10 April2003 respectively.
Source:
Jobcentre Plus computer systems (including clerically held cases)

National Insurance

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many pensioners who live abroad and have a full National Insurance record have not had their pension up-rated since they moved; and what the current lowest full basic state pension paid to such a pensioner is; [125029]

(2) how many pensioners who live abroad and have a full National Insurance contribution record have not had their pension up-rated since they moved; and what the lowest full basic state pension paid to a pensioner living abroad who has a full contribution record is. [125030]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is that, as at 30 September 2002, 488,400 State Pensioners living abroad will not have their State Pension increased.

Source:
Five per cent sample from the Pensions Strategy Computer System as at 30 September 2002.
Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Official Spelling

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make it his policy that official *(a)* correspondence, *(b)* reports and *(c)* documentation from his office use the English spelling of words where this differs from the US version. [118861]

Maria Eagle: The Department for Work and Pensions follows Cabinet Office Guidance for the Handling of Ministerial and Other Correspondence; this ensures that the quality of replies is high.

The department also has its own guidance in place known as Better Letters and Effective Business Writing which emphasise the importance of using plain English in all departmental correspondence.

Departmental publications are prepared in line with the Guidance on the Work of the Government Information and Communication Service.

Plastic Card Fraud

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions following the introduction of direct payment for benefits, what measures he has introduced to. [119848]

Mr. Pond: Direct Payment is a more secure and efficient method of payment. We have been paying benefits into customers' accounts for many years. We have no evidence of weakness in the system of delivering Direct Payments to financial institutions once a payment has been authorised it is sent and received securely. The financial institutions already have robust security measures to safeguard cash withdrawals using plastic cards, including benefit payments, from their customers' accounts.

Post Office Card Accounts

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Post Office Card Accounts he estimates will have been opened by 2005; what the cost to the Government of this number of accounts is; and what the cost would be if five million such accounts were to be opened by this time. [125335]

Mr. Pond *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* Our working assumption is around three million Post Office card accounts will have been opened by 2005. However, there is no cap on numbers and anyone who wants to open an account can do so. Present indications are that the final number will be significantly above three million. The precise cost at any given level of take-up is commercial in confidence to Post Office Limited and is not released in line with paragraph 13, part 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government information.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 19 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 412W, on Post Office card accounts, if he will break down the figures in respect of each benefit of the customers *(a)* who were invited to take part in direct payment and *(b)* who have failed to respond to the invitation; and for what reasons the answer did not contain the information requested. [121681]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 26 June 2003]:* I regret that the information given in my previous answer was incomplete due to an error.

As at 6 June 2003 the precise break down of figures is 2,797,879 customers have been invited to convert to direct payment.

Of those, 2,354,313 are child benefit customers, 108,837 are Veterans Agency customers, 148,148 are pensions customers and 186,581 are Jobcentre Plus customers.

We are awaiting a response from 705,699 This consists of 514,235 child benefit customers, 11,775 Veterans Agency customers, 61,320 pension service customers and 118,369 Jobcentre Plus customers.

Pensions and Jobcentre Plus customers began their conversion process with controlled pilots. Their full conversion commenced at the beginning of May 2003. This corrects the information given in my answer on 19 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 412W.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the cost of automatically creating Post Office Card Accounts for those benefit and pension claimants who choose not to open a bank account following contact from his Department as part of the migration programme. [124302]

Mr. Pond: We have made no such estimates. The Post Office card account is one of the banking options available to customers. The choice of account is a matter for the customer. It would not be appropriate for the Department to open a Post Office card account on a customer's behalf, in the same way as it would be inappropriate for us to do so for any other sort of bank account.

Social Fund

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what proportion of rejected applications to the Social Fund for *(a)* budgeting loans and *(b)* crisis loans have been overturned on appeal in each year since 1997; [110912]

(2) how many applications there have been to the Social Fund for *(a)* budgeting loans and *(b)* crisis loans in each year since 1997; and how many have been rejected in each of those years. [110921]

Mr. Pond: An applicant to the discretionary Social Fund who is dissatisfied with the decision on their application has the right to have the decision reviewed.

An internal reviewing officer carries out the initial review at local level, and the applicant is notified of the outcome. Applicants who remain dissatisfied with the result of the local review can ask for a further review by an independent Social Fund Inspector.

Information on the number and proportion of applications initially refused, but which resulted in awards following review is not available. Information on the number of applications made and the number which were initially refused is in the table.

Social Fund loan applications and refusals 1996–97 to 2002–03

	Budgeting loan applications	*Budgeting loan refusals*	*Crisis loan applications*	*Crisis loan refusals*
1996–97	1,339,000	475,000	1,022,000	233,000
1997–98	1,330,000	494,000	1,057,000	230,000
1998–99	1,327,000	442,000	1,135,000	247,000
1999–2000	1,680,000	647,000	1,294,000	336,000
2000–01	1,724,000	531,000	1,292,000	342,000
2001–02	1,748,000	460,000	1,330,000	317,000
2002–03	1,774,000	466,000	1,391,000	305,000

Notes:

1. If an application is initially refused, but an award is subsequently made on review, the case will still be counted as an (initial) refusal in the table.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Source:

Social Fund Policy, Budget and Management Information System

Stakeholder Pension (Women)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the impact of the stakeholder pension on pension rights for women. [125355]

Malcolm Wicks: Stakeholder pensions do not impose penalties if a person stops paying contributions for a time, or if they transfer their pension to another provider. They are therefore a pension option for people who change jobs often or who have breaks in their employment and savings patterns, which includes many women.

We are monitoring trends in take-up of stakeholder pensions, including differences in take-up between men and women, using a number of sources.

Information from the Association of British Insurers (ABI) shows that in the period 1 January 2002 to 30 June 2002 over 40 per cent. of stakeholder pension sales were to, or for, women. In comparison 30 per cent. of personal pension products are held by women.

State Pension

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the cost in *(a)* gross terms and *(b)* net terms of restoring the earnings link for the state pension in each year between 2005–06 and 2010–11, assuming that the policy was introduced in April 2004 and applied to (i) all pensioners, (ii) pensioners aged 65 or above, (iii) pensioners aged 70 and above, (iv) pensioners aged 75 and above and (v) pensioners aged 80 and above. [126035]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is set out in the tables.

Table 1: The gross cost of restoring a link with earnings in the basic State Pension from April 2004

£ billion

	2005–06	*2006–07*	*2007–08*	*2008–09*	*2009–10*	*2010–11*
All pensioners	1.7	2.5	3.3	4.2	5.2	6.2
Pensioners aged 65 and over	1.6	2.2	2.9	3.7	4.5	5.4
Pensioners aged 70 and over	1.1	1.6	2.1	2.7	3.3	3.9
Pensioners aged 75 and over	800	1.1	1.4	1.8	2.2	2.6
Pensioners aged 80 and over	500	600	900	1.1	1.3	1.6

Table 2: The net cost of restoring a link with earnings in the basic State Pension from April 2004

£ billion

	2005–06	*2006–07*	*2007–08*	*2008–09*	*2009–10*	*2010–11*
All pensioners	1.1	1.6	2.2	2.8	3.4	4.1
Pensioners aged 65 and over	1.3	1.8	2.4	3.0	3.7	4.4
Pensioners aged 70 and over	900	1.2	1.7	2.1	2.6b	3.0
Pensioners aged 75 and over	600	800	1.1	1.4	1.7b	2.0
Pensioners aged 80 and over	300	500	600	800	900	1.1

Notes:

1. All costs are rounded to the nearest £100 million and are in 2003–04 price terms.
2. Gross costs are calculated by the Government Actuary's Department and are consistent with Budget 2003 assumptions. It is assumed that the earnings link is restored in April 2004.
3. The net costs are calculated using the DWP Policy Simulation Model for 2005–06. The net cost represents the cost after allowing for any offsetting savings in income-related benefits.
4. In the case where the earnings link is restored for all pensions, it is assumed that the start of the Savings Credit is increased to the value of the earnings linked basic State Pension. In the other variants it is assumed that the start of the Savings Credit is unchanged.

State Pensions Forecasts

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many state pensions forecasts his Department expects to produce in the next three years; how many people will be required to process those projected forecasts; and what the estimated cost is to process them. [122268]

Malcolm Wicks: In the year 2003–04 we expect to issue 843,000 Individual Pension Forecasts; over one million Combined Pension Forecasts and 1.9 million Automatic Pension Forecasts to the self-employed in 2003–04. The total number of State Pension Forecasts for 2003–04 will therefore be approximately 3,944,000. This is five times the number issued in 2002–03.

We are currently finalising our forecasting plans in response to the Green Paper "Simplicity, Security and Choice," Cm 5677, and the subsequent consultation exercise. We have not made final decisions on the total number of planned forecasts for 2004–05 and 2005–06.

The current number of staff processing all forecasts is the equivalent of 175 full time staff. The estimated operational cost for this year is £3.9 million. Estimates

of the operational costs for future years are not currently available as they are subject to decisions that we make as part of the Informed Choice package in the Green Paper.

State Second Pension

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether it is the Government's policy to turn the state second pension into a flat-rate benefit. [125408]

Malcolm Wicks: The Government are keeping the position under review, taking account of progress on stakeholder pensions and the wider developments in pensions and savings as set out in the Pensions Green Paper "Simplicity, security and choice: Working and saving for retirement" (Cm 5677).

Tax Credits

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has *(a)* received from and *(b)* made to the Scottish Executive concerning recent problems with the credit payments, broken down by (i) subject, (ii) date and (iii) responsible Scottish Minister. [122510]

Malcolm Wicks: We regularly communicate with Scottish Office Ministers on matters of mutual interest. At official level, there is regular contact between officials in the Department and their Scottish Executive counterparts.

Pension Credit will be introduced from October 2003.

Teenage Mothers

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of teenage mothers are dependent on benefit; and what proportion this represents of the benefit budget. [123592]

Mr. Pond: The information requested is not available.

Work-related Accidents

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many work-related *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious injuries occurred in the Truro and St. Austell constituency in (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002; and how many prosecutions took place as a result. [124444]

Mr. Browne: Information at constituency level is not available.

The number of work-related *(a)* deaths and *(b)* major injuries reported to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in the district councils of Carrick and Restormel in (i) 1999–2000 (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02, and the number of health and safety at work prosecutions which have taken place as a result, are shown in the table.

Year[1]	*Work-Related Deaths*[2]	*Separate Offences Prosecuted*	*Major injury*[2]	*Separate Offences Prosecuted*
1999–2000	3	—	171	2
2000–01	1	—	132	—
2001–02	2	—	111	[3]—

[1] The annual basis is the planning year from 1 April to 31 March
[2] Deaths and major injuries to employees, self-employed people and members of the public
[3] HSE Prosecutions may yet follow deaths or injuries that occurred in 2001–02

The number of work-related *(a)* deaths and *(b)* major injuries reported to the district councils of Carrick and Restormel in (i) 1999–2000 (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02, and the number of prosecutions by the councils, are shown in the table.

Year[1]	*Work-Related Deaths*[2]	*Major injury*[2]	*Number of Separate Offences Prosecuted (all health and safety offences)*[3]
1999–2000	—	73	2
2000–01[4]	—	68	—
2001–02	—	61	Not yet available

[1] The annual basis is the planning year from 1 April to 31 March
[2] Deaths and major injuries to employees, self-employed people and members of the public
[3] Figures for offences prosecuted by local authorities specifically following death or major injury are not available except at disproportionate cost
[4] Restormel District Council did not include details of enforcement action in their annual Local Authority health and safety return for 2000–01

The number of health and safety at work prosecutions by Carrick and Restormel district councils for 2001–02 will be available on 31 July.

Workplace Safety

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many work-related *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious injuries occurred in Worcester for the last year for which data are available; and how many prosecutions took place as a result. [122517]

Mr. Browne: The number of work-related *(a)* deaths and *(b)* major injuries reported to HSE in Worcester in 2001–02, and the number of health and safety at work prosecutions which have taken place as a result, are as follows:

	2001–02[1]
Work-related deaths[2]	0
Major injury[2]	109

[1] The annual basis is the planning year from 1 April to 31 March.
[2] Deaths and major injuries to employees, self-employed people and members of the public.

As yet no prosecutions have been taken in relation to these deaths and injuries. The number of work-related *(a)* deaths and *(b)* major injuries reported to Worcester city council in 2001–02, are as follows:

	2001–02[1]
Work-related deaths[2]	1
Major injury[2]	30

[1] The annual basis is the planning year from 1 April to 31 March.
[2] Deaths and major injuries to employees, self-employed people and members of the public.

The number of health and safety at work prosecutions by the Council in 2001–02 will be available shortly. I will write to my hon. Friend with these statistics when they become available and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Department has received on providing assistance for the re-establishment of a police force in Iraq [125695]

Mr. Rammell: Government officials continue to discuss with the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) how best the UK can contribute to the CPA's work to rebuild the Iraqi police service. The UK considers the restoration of the rule of law in Iraq to be a priority and will stay closely engaged with the CPA on issues of funding and assistance. In particular, the UK has deployed a senior police officer to Baghdad to assist with advising and training the new Iraq police service. In addition to this a further senior officer will deploy to Basra on 15 July to advise CPA (South). The CPA intends to hold a police contributor's conference shortly to garner support for a substantial international policing contribution, the UK is actively considering making a further part of this process.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the relationship between the United Nations and the Iraq Survey Group. [125544]

Mr. MacShane: The Iraq Survey Group reports to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq. Under the terms of UN Security Council Resolution 1483, Coalition partners will make periodic reports to the UN Security Council on activities in Iraq.

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Iraq sought the supply of uranium from Africa that had no civil nuclear application in Iraq since 1998. [125731]

Mr. MacShane: Iraq's civil nuclear programme was frozen under UN Security Council Resolution 707 in August 1991. Iraq would, therefore, have no legitimate civil application for any uranium sought or procured after that time.

Arms Exports

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 15 May to the right hon. and Learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) *Official Report*, column 403W, on arms exports, if he will list *(a)* the dates of the visits and *(b)* the names of those involved in the promotion of Ministry exports on such visits. [122149]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to the pursuant answer my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave to the right hon. and learned Member for North East Fife (Menzies Campbell) on 14 July, *Official Report*, column 47–8W. Further dates of such visits by Ministers in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are:

Chile: Baroness Symons 6–8 March 2002.

India: Foreign Secretary 27 February and 29 May 2002.

Mike O'Brien 17 October 2002.

Singapore: Ben Bradshaw 21 May 2002.

Foreign Secretary 8 January 2003.

Chechnya

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department had with President Putin about human rights in Chechnya. [125279]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary discussed the situation in Chechnya with President Putin and Foreign Minister Ivanov during the State Visit last month. President Putin briefed on the political process. The Prime Minister supported a political solution to the conflict and stressed that the Chechen people should have a say in their own internal affairs.

Colombia

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Colombia. [125519]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no plans to visit Colombia. I undertook a visit in May.

Consultation Documents

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the consultation documents issued by his Department in each of the last four years; what the cost was of producing each of these; how many documents were issued in each consultation; and how many responses were received in each consultation. [124576]

Mr. Straw: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has conducted the following public consultations in the last four years:

Panel 2000: Consultation Document. Presented to Parliament on 10 September 1998 and closed on 15 November 1998. The website address is http://www.fco. gov.uk/Files/kfile/panel2000Apdf

Cost: £75,057 (excluding staff costs)

Consultation Document was sent to 500 businesses and NGOs asking for comments. It was sent to a wide range of organisations throughout Britain and it was published on the FCO's website.

There were 55 substantive responses to the Consultation paper

International Criminal Court: Consultation on draft legislation. Presented to Parliament on 1 August 2000 and closed on 12 October 2000. The website address is: http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/icc.pdf

Cost: £6,156 (excluding staff costs)

400 copies, plus an electronic copy produced

45 responses were received

Private Military Companies: Options for Regulation. Presented to Parliament on 12 February 2002 and closed on 12 August 2002. The website address is: http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/mercenaries.0.pdf

Cost: £4,165 (excluding staff costs)

500 copies of the document were produced

39 responses were received

Strengthening the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention: Countering the Threat from Biological Weapons. Presented to Parliament on 29 April 2002 and closed on 13 September 2002. The website address is: http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/btwc290402.pdf

Cost: £2,044 (excluding staff costs)

There was a single report, of which the FCO ordered 500 copies in the time frame of the reply (the Green Paper itself).

The FCO received 16 formal responses

Cyprus

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the compliance by occupied Cyprus with the judgement of the European Court of Human Rights in the Loizidou case. [123181]

Mr. MacShane: We welcome the recent commitment by Turkey to pay the money awarded to Ms Loizidou by the European Court of Human Rights.

We urge the Turkish authorities to continue to work with the Council of Europe Secretariat to ensure that this payment is made as soon as possible.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a new procedure for application for a pass for British Forces Cyprus Service Personnel to visit Northern Cyprus will be announced; and if he will make a statement. [125025]

Mr. Ingram: I have been asked to reply.

A review of procedures for passes for British Forces Cyprus Service Personnel to visit the north of Cyprus is being conducted by the British High Commission in conjunction with the Sovereign Base Areas Administration and Headquarters British Forces Cyprus. All affected personnel will be notified once the review is complete. In the meantime British Force Cyprus Service Personnel continue to be able to visit the north of Cyprus.

Estonia

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance his Department has given to Estonia towards assisting the development of *(a)* their police service and *(b)* their NPA Estonian Neighbourhood Watch scheme; and if he will make a statement. [125529]

Mr. MacShane: Through the British Embassy in Tallinn, the UK is actively supporting the Estonian police in preparing for EU accession. In particular, the government has funded UK experts to provide training in the fields of human rights and police ethics, counter-terrorism, facilitation skills for Police training officers and English language training.

The FCO coordinated the UK's participation as lead nation in an EU twinning project with Estonia. Contacts established between the UK National Neighbourhood Watch Association and its Estonian counterpart in the context of this project have led to further cooperation between the two organisations.

European Constitution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with counterparts in the European Union about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European Constitution. [124755]

Mr. MacShane: Foreign Office Ministers and officials have had regular discussions with their counterparts in Member and Accession States on issues arising in the Convention on the Future of Europe.

India

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Indian Government on the destruction of the national habitat for tigers in Rajastan for the mining of minerals to make talcum powder. [123668]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: While we have not raised this issue with the Government of India we are looking for an opportunity to do so soon. In the interim, the High Commission in New Delhi will monitor the situation.

International Criminal Court

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries recognise the authority of the International Criminal Court. [126173]

Mr. Rammell: There are presently 90 States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, a full list of which may be found on the UN website www.un.org.

IT Projects

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what major IT projects with a value in excess of £10,000 he authorised expenditure in each of the last three financial years. [125775]

Mr. Rammell: Expenditure has been authorised on the following major IT projects in the last three financial years:

Major IT Projects	*Expenditure in year*		
	2000–01	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Firecrest—Infrastructure project to provide modern, easy to use office automation throughout the FCO	Yes	Yes	Yes
Foreign and Commonwealth Office Telecommunications Network(FTN)—An integrated and global telecommunications service	Yes	Yes	Yes

Major IT Projects	Expenditure in year 2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
Prism—Personnel, finance and procurement system	No	Yes	Yes
Internet—UK portal site providing British Public Sector Information	Yes	Yes	Yes
Entry Clearance Modernisation—To support entry clearance modernisation	Yes	Yes	Yes
Digital passport—Providing a modern machine readable passport system	No	Yes	Yes
Consular Database—A centralised consular database	No	Yes	Yes
Knowledge—FCO knowledge management system	No	Yes	Yes

Of the above projects, expenditure on FTN, Prism, Digital passports and Consular database was approved by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. Other expenditure on major projects was authorised through delegated authority.

Liberia

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Liberia. [125299]

Mr. Mullin: There is a lull in the fighting in Liberia. On 10 July, the Joint Verification Team, comprising the UN, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and all sides in the conflict, began to verify and monitor the cease-fire. We continue to encourage all parties to respect the cease-fire and participate actively in the peace talks taking place in Ghana. The talks should lead to a negotiated political settlement and transitional government.

The security and humanitarian situation is of serious concern. There are reports of 250,000 displaced civilians in Monrovia alone. Fuel, water and medical supplies are in short supply and looting is rife. A cholera outbreak has already killed more than 300 people. The UK has committed £2.5 million for humanitarian activity in Liberia this year, including £1.5 million as a response to the latest fighting.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he plans to send British military personnel to Liberia. [125300]

Mr. Mullin: There are no plans to send UK troops to Liberia at present.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assesssment he has made of the effect of the exit from power of President Charles Taylor on the stability of Liberia. [125301]

Mr. Mullin: President Taylor has been a destabilising influence in Liberia and the region. The UK does not see a political future for him in Liberia. We hope that he will stand down as he has promised to do. The cease-fire agreement, signed in Ghana on 17 June, included provision for the formation of a transitional government, not including President Taylor. Peace talks currently taking place in Ghana aim to agree a political roadmap, leading to free and fair elections.

On 4 June 2003 the Special Court for Sierra Leone unsealed an indictment for President Charles Taylor of Liberia as one of those who bear the greatest responsibility for war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international humanitarian law in Sierra Leone since 1996.

The UK has called on Charles Taylor to surrender himself to the Court and continues to encourage all states, particularly those in the region, to cooperate with the Court and facilitate his arrest.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* the US Administration and *(b)* the Liberian Government concerning (i) the situation in Liberia and (ii) the possible deployment of a peacekeeping force. [125302]

Mr. Mullin: We have ongoing discussions with the US Administration at all levels concerning all aspects of the situation in Liberia, including the possible deployment of a peacekeeping force.

There have been no discussions on the specifics of troop deployment with the Government of Liberia. However, Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials met Samuel P Jackson, Minister of State for Financial and Economic Affairs in the Office of the President of Liberia, to discuss the current situation on 26 and 27 June.

Turkmenistan

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Turkmenistan concerning raids made by the authorities on Baptist church services. [125836]

Mr. Rammell: Our Embassy in Ashgabat have made representations to the Turkmen government expressing our concern about the issue of raids on Baptist church services and harrassment of unregistered religious groups in Turkmenistan. We expressed the hope that no such further actions will be taken against peaceful congregations of an entirely religious character.

The Turkmen authorities are well aware of our concerns on religious freedom issues, including the fact that only two denominations (Sunni Islam and the Russian Orthodox Church) have secured registration, despite others having reportedly fulfilled all necessary procedures.

Uganda

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the security situation in Uganda; and if he will make a statement. [125255]

Mr. Mullin: We are concerned about the deteriorating security situation in the north of Uganda following an upsurge in violence by the rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). We are particularly concerned about the impact on the local population and the recent

abductions of school children. While we understand the Ugandan Government's aim of combating the LRA militarily, we have, through our High Commission in Kampala, encouraged them to consider all alternative methods of bringing the conflict to an end. We are also consulting with other donor partners in Uganda on ways to help resolve the conflict.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Administration Costs

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the equivalent figures for administration costs in Table 5, p173 of the Annual Report 2003 were for 1996–97. [124853]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* The equivalent figures for administrative costs in Table 5, page 173 of the 2003 Home Office Annual Report for 1996–97 were published in the Running Costs table, page 85 of the 1999–2000 Home Office Annual Report.

Advice Publication

Jim Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 646–47W, if he will publish the independent expert advice received by the Department. [125382]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* We took advice on TETRA health and safety issues from the National Radiological Protection Board's (NRPB's) Independent Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation (AGNIR). The AGNIR report entitled "Possible health effects from Terrestrial Trunked Radio (TETRA)" was published as Volume 12 No. 2, 2001 in the "Documents of the NRPB" series. It is available on the NRPB web site, http://www.nrpb.org.uk.

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 23 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 595W, if he will list the buildings which have been identified as containing asbestos. [122966]

Fiona Mactaggart: No central records are kept on buildings, which contain asbestos. This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, we can more readily provide details of buildings, which contain asbestos for certain parts of our estate. These are listed.

Asbestos is only a risk to health if fibres are released into the air and breathed in. As long as it is in good condition and is not going to be disturbed or damaged there is no risk. The Department complies with the current regulations on asbestos. This ensures the safety of staff, contractors, inmates or visitors from asbestos. Department is taking steps to ensure that we will comply with the requirements of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002 (which come into force in May 2004).

Central London Headquarters estate:

Queen Anne's Gate
Horseferry House

UK Passport Service

Olympia House, Newport
India Buildings, Liverpool
Aragon Court, Peterbrough
Milburngate House, Durham

National Probation Services Estate

Town Moor, 38/40 Christchurch Road, Doncaster
Seafield Lodge, 71/73 Shoot Up Hill, London
2 Corfton Road, Ealing
St. Josephs Lodge, Miller Street, Patricroft
172/174 Withington Road, Whalley Range, Manchester
Carpenter House, 33 Portland Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham

The above Probation Service buildings were identified as having asbestos from inspections carried out this year. Further surveys are being conducted on the remainder of the probation estate.

HM Prison Service

The following establishments have been identified as containing asbestos:

Sudbury
Ranby
Stocken
Garth
Lancaster Farms
Chelmsford
Blundeston
Whitemoor
Dover
Cookham Wood
Swaleside
Send
Dorchester
Channings Wood
Bristol
Brixton
Holloway
Hindley
Styal
Castington
Low Newton
Albany
Bullingdon
Stoke Heath
Swinfen Hall
Usk
Lindholme
Leeds
Full Sutton
Leicester
Onley
Lewes
Doncaster
Lincoln
Foston Hall

Wellingbrough
Haverigg
Preston
Hollesley Bay
The Grange
Bullswood Hall
Standford Hill
Blantyre House
High Down
Gloucester
The Verne
Guys Marsh
Shepton Mallet
Latchmere
Wormwood Scrubs
Risley
Kirklevington Grange
Holme House
Aylesbury
Haslar
Woodhill
Werrington JC
Drake Hall
Frescoed
Wetherby
Northallerton
Wakefield
Shrewsbury
Long Lartin
Kingston
Whatton
Morton Hall
Glen Parva
Kirkham
Wymott
Bedford
Wayland
Highpoint
Downview
Ford
Elmley
Dartmoor
Portland
Erlestoke
Eastwood Park
Feltham
Buckley Hall
Thorn Cross
Deerbolt
Durham
Parkhurst
Grendon/Springhill
Birmingham
Featherstone
Swansea
Hull
Wealstun
Moorland
New Hall
Brockhill
Reading
Canterbury
North Sea Camp
Ashwell
Gartree
Lancaster Castle
Norwich
Highpoint (S)
Littlehey
Maidstone
Rochester
Coldingley
East Sutton Park
Exeter
The Weare
Leyhill
Wandsworth
Belmarsh
Liverpool
Manchester
Acklington
Frankland
Camp Hill
Huntercombe
Hewell Grange
Newbold Revel
Cardiff
Everthorpe
Askham Grange
Hatfield
Stafford
Nottingham
Winchester
Wolds

Asylum Seekers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been granted exceptional right to work in the last 12 months; and what his estimate is of the number of asylum seekers who remain in employment which they commenced prior to the abolition of the employment concession. [124987]

Beverley Hughes: Information about the number of asylum seekers granted permission to work exceptionally in the last 12 months is not available centrally and could be obtained only by examination of individual case files.

There are no estimates on the number of asylum seekers who remain in employment having been granted permission to work prior to the abolition of the employment concession.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made towards setting a target for the proportion of asylum cases to be decided within six months. [124991]

Beverley Hughes: The six-month target is the joint responsibility of the Home Office and the Department for Constitutional Affairs. Both Departments are working closely to finalise a challenging but realistic target and will publish this as soon as it is available.

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Iraqi asylum applications have been refused in each of the last five years. [125101]

Beverley Hughes: The table shows the number of Iraqi asylum applicants, excluding dependants, refused asylum or exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom between January 1998 and December 2002. These statistics relate to initial decisions only and exclude the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.

Initial decisions on applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom[1] for nationals of Iraq—1998 to 2002

Number of principal applicants

		Cases considered under normal procedures[3]			*Backlog clearance exercise[4]*	
	Initial decisions[2]	*Granted asylum*	*Granted ELR*	*Refused*	*Granted asylum or ELR under backlog criteria*	*Refused under backlog criteria[5]*
1998	1,100	510	500	90	—	—
1999	745	315	320	100	5	*
2000	5,530	845	2,455	2,220	10	*
2001[6]	8,880	815	1,855	6,210	—	—
2002[6]	11,785	700	8,130	2,955	—	—

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5, with * = 1 or 2.
[2] Information is of initial decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.
[3] Cases considered under normal procedures may include some cases decided under the backlog criteria.
[4] Cases decided under measures aimed at reducing the pre-1996 asylum application backlog.
[5] Includes some cases where the application has been refused on substantive grounds.
[6] Provisional data.

Information on initial decisions on asylum applications is published quarterly. The next publication will cover the period up to June 2003, and will be available provisionally from 28 August 2003 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Iraqi asylum seekers have been required to return to Iraq in the past year; and if he will make a statement. [125103]

Beverley Hughes: Excluding dependants, it is estimated that 195 Iraqi nationals who had sought asylum at some stage were removed in 2002. This figure includes persons deciding to leave after the initiation of enforcement action against them, and persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Returns Programmes run by the International Organization for Migration.

Information on the destination of these removals is not available.

Data on removals by nationality in the period January to March 2003 are due to be published on 28 August on the Home Office web-site www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/whatsnew1.html

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the UNHCR's observations on the situation in Iraq and large scale return of Iraqi refugees; [125104]

(2) if he will implement a moratorium on *(a)* Iraqi asylum decisions and *(b)* the proposals to return rejected applicants. [125105]

Beverley Hughes: Decision making on Iraqi asylum applications was suspended on 20 March 2003 at the onset of military action. The rapidly changing country conditions meant that there was insufficient information to make a fully considered decision, either positive or negative, about an applicant's claim and whether they would qualify for asylum under the United Nations Convention.

We decided to resume processing of Iraqi asylum applications with effect from 16 June 2003. This coincided with a decision by the Independent Appellate Authority (IAA) to begin relisting asylum appeal hearings from the same date.

While there remain security and humanitarian concerns in some areas, the threat of persecution from Saddam Hussein's regime no longer exists. We did not want to keep applications on hold longer than necessary given the uncertainty this creates for the individuals concerned. Having obtained information about conditions in Iraq from a range of sources, we concluded that there was sufficient information on which to base decisions As with asylum applications from all nationalities, each case will be considered individually on its merits.

The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) is currently making preparations for the eventual return of large numbers of Iraqis and is developing a return and reintegration plan. UNHCR understands that there are people who wish to return right now and is aware that we are making plans for voluntary return programmes. We are aware of their concerns and will continue to work closely with them. With this in mind, we are developing a coherent returns

strategy. Initially the emphasis will be on facilitating voluntary returns. Enforced returns will only be considered once we are satisfied that conditions on the ground allow for this.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* country of departure and *(b)* country of origin of asylum seekers who made an asylum claim at (i) Heathrow and (ii) Gatwick airports in each of the last five years. [125185]

Beverley Hughes: Data is not collated centrally on the origin or the country of departure of asylum seekers, only by nationality. To obtain information on the number of people, who claimed asylum at Heathrow and Gatwick, over the last five years, would be possible only by examination of individual case-files at a disproportionate cost.

Community Support Officers

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he has issued to chief constables on the *(a)* recruitment and *(b)* use of community support officers. [122882]

Ms Blears: The recruitment and deployment of community support officers (CSOs) is a matter for chief officers. In December 2002 the Home Office issued a "Frequently Asked Questions" document which gave some advice on these issues. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has also published a more detailed guidance document on CSOs, with material on both recruitment and deployment. This guidance is available to chief officers on the ACPO intranet site.

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of community support officers. [125107]

Ms Blears: The 27 forces who received first round Community Support Officer (CSO) funding are required to carry out a formal evaluation of their schemes. I expect to receive their initial findings by the end of September. In addition to this I have already received a significant amount of informal evidence, such as letters from members of the public, indicating that CSOs have been a great success in combating low level crime and reassuring the public.

Consultation Documents

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the consultation documents issued by his Department in each of the last four years; what the cost was of producing each of these; how many documents were issued in each consultation; and how many responses were received in each consultation. [124575]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Government recommend that policy development should be done in close consultation with stakeholders. Formal consultation documents are only one part of this process, which includes:

Stakeholder meetings
Listening events/public meetings
Web forums
Public surveys
Focus groups
Regional events
Free-phone and freepost surveys and events
Targeted leaflet campaigns
Road shows and exhibitions.

It is standard practice for departments to evaluate the policy development process, including the use of consultation.

Details of the number of consultation documents issued in each consultation exercise are not collated on a central basis and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Also provision of full details as requested for the years 1999–2000 would also incur disproportionate cost. However to give the fullest reply I can advise that the Home Office launched 19 consultations in 1999 and 28 consultation papers in 2000. Details of Home Office consultation publications can be found at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/inside/consults/index.html

The following table lists the consultations launched in 2001, 2002 plus those that were launched this year and for which the consultation period has concluded. I include figures for cost where available; methodology in calculating costs may vary.

Consultation papers launched in 2001

Title	*Number of responses*	*Available figures for cost (£)*
Animal Procedures—review of the Ethical Review Process	139	35,000
Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000—New Laws for a successful Multi-Racial Britain	302	30,000
Review of the victims Charter	n/a	n/a
The Law on Extradition: a review	15	82,000
Animal Rights Extremism: Government Strategy: A Consultation	55	n/a
The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974: A consultation leaflet	95	2,155
Guidance for the use of an Intermediary under s.29 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999	86	80,617
Funding Community Groups: a consultation document	235	3,742
The Halliday Report—Making punishments work	305	75,000
Consultation of use of X/Gamma Radiation Scanner.	n/a	n/a
Extension of Civil Penalties to Freight Shuttle Wagons	n/a	n/a
Consultation Paper on the Review of Part 1 of the Sex Offenders Act 1997	46	50,000 plus
Accessing Communications data—draft code of practice	n/a	n/a
Police and Criminal Evidence Act—Code F	10	n/a
Ratification of the Driving Disqualification Convention	46	n/a
Review of Family Visitors Appeals	n/a	n/a

Consultation papers launched in 2001

Title	Number of responses	Available figures for cost (£)
Improving the planning of Young People Substance Misuse Services	440	n/a
Fees for the removal and storage of vehicles, under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984	21	n/a
White Paper 'Policing a New Century: A Blueprint for reform	1,200	n/a
Death in Police Custody—Consultation paper on revising the definition of categories of deaths of members of the public during or following police contact	14	930

Consultation papers launched in 2002

Title	Number of responses	Available figures for cost
Motor Salvage Operators Regulations 2002, made under the Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001	26	n/a
Secure Borders Safe Haven—Integration with diversity in modern Britain	330	n/a
Extension of controlled drugs licensing	49	n/a
Proposed changes to the Misuse of Drugs legislation	11	n/a
Review of Crime Reduction Training	n/a	n/a
Police and Criminal Evidence Act—Code A	45	n/a
Review of Work Permit Policy on Recruitment of employment agencies and contractors	54	n/a
Charging for the consideration of Work Permit applications	135	n/a
Merger of CDRPs/DATs	234	n/a
Working Holidaymaker Scheme: Consultation document	84	5,219 inc 4,750 staff costs
Police and Criminal Evidence Act—Code B	28	No separate costs available as part of wider review
Police and Criminal Evidence Act—Code C	16	No separate costs available as part of wider review
Police and Criminal Evidence Act—Code D	105	No separate costs available as part of wider review
Police and Criminal Evidence Act—Code E	16	No separate costs available as part of wider review
Entitlement Cards and Identity Fraud	5,031	Responses still being analysed. Too early to calculate cost.
Breaking the Circle—A report of the review of the rehabilitation of offenders act	68	50,000
Justice for All (Home Office, Attorney General and Lord Chancellor)	242	n/a
Death in Police Custody—Consultation paper on revising the definition of categories of deaths of members of the public during or following police contact	13	n/a
Protocol to the Convention on mutual assistance in criminal matters	3	n/a
Proceeds of Crime Act Section 292—Code of Practice for search powers regarding recovery of criminal proceeds	23	2,652
Proceeds of Crime Act—Part 7 (Money laundering) Section 339 Form and manner of disclosures.	54	2,964
Fundamental review of death certification and the Coroner services in England, Wales and Northern Ireland	500+	1.1 million for the review as a whole. The writing, issuing and consideration of the responses to the consultation document were not available separately.
Criminal Justice White Paper: Proposals on jury exemptions and excusals PRIA	56	4,300
Proceeds of Crime Act section 377—Investigation powers	24	3,325
Proposals to make lawful the supply of specific items of drugs paraphernalia to drug users	75	n/a
Implementation of juxtaposed controls at Calais	13	n/a
IAA 1999 provision of facilities at ports and charging for additional services section 25/26 1999 Act	8	2,000

Consultation papers launched in 2003 and closed to date.

Title	Number of responses	Available figures for cost
Sexual Offences Bill—sex offenders who travel abroad	26	n/a
Insurance Cover Working Group paper (Voluntary Sector Insurance)	n/a	n/a
Patient Group Directions (PGD)—Proposal to permit the supply of certain controlled drugs by health professionals under the PGD system.	80	n/a
Criminal Records Bureau—reform of the disclosure process	570	11,400
Access to communications data—respecting privacy and protecting the public from crime	187	66,167
Retention of communications data—Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001	54	25,251
Bind overs—a power for the 21st Century	16	3,500 approx
Nationality, Immigration and Asylum (NIA) Act 2002. Sections 134–139: Implementation of new information powers.	16	n/a
Juxtaposed controls implementation—Dover-Calais	10	765

Consultation papers launched in 2003 and closed to date

Title	*Number of responses*	*Available figures for cost*
Criminal Records Bureau—Basic Disclosure: Routing applications for basic disclosure through registered bodies	358	Still being analysed. Costs not known yet
New sentencing guidance for the court of appeal on the crime of Robbery	30—including one anticipated late response	n/a
Review of the seasonal agricultural workers scheme	n/a	n/a

Correspondence

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Crosby regarding delays in releasing persons subject to immigration control from Her Majesty's Prison Liverpool at the end of criminal sentences. [124240]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 14 July 2003.

Crime (Older People)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what initiatives to tackle crimes against older people his Department is responsible. [124439]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* Elderly people are far less likely to suffer crime than younger people. But in recognition that crime against older people is particularly distasteful, we have funded several schemes specifically to tackle this problem.

We set up a Distraction Burglary Task Force in 2000 to facilitate a multi-agency approach to reducing the problem of bogus callers and rogue traders. The task force includes people from different agencies who work with older people, such as Age Concern and Help the Aged, as well agencies such as the police. It has invested substantial resources and effort in promoting local schemes to tackle the problem, liaising with utility companies and others that need to call on the elderly, gathering data and publicising good practice both to the elderly and to those that work with them.

Under the Crime Reduction Programme, we funded a two-year programme (the Locks for Pensioners scheme) to provide home security upgrades for low income pensioners in areas with burglary rates above the national average. The scheme was run in conjunction with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra's) Warm Front scheme, and, under it, over 58,000 homes received additional locks or bolts.

The Locks for Pensioners scheme has ended. But it is now open to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships to fund local schemes where they identify crime against the elderly as a problem in their area. We cannot provide comprehensive data on locally funded projects for the elderly as this information is not held centrally. However, we know that interventions being implemented include improving the appearance and security of homes, sharing intelligence with all the involved agencies, educating people in crime reduction measures and providing reassurance and assistance.

The work we are taking forward to tackle crime generally, while not solely aimed at older people, deals with many of the concerns they have about their safety.

General initiatives which may have a particular impact on older people include the introduction of Community Support Officers tasked with tackling low-level crime and anti-social behaviour of the sort that causes older people much concern, and work with the Department of Health to evaluate the effectiveness of security technology in reducing crime and the fear of crime in two pilot hospitals and one ambulance service in England.

Dangerous Dogs

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many local authorities have initiated prosecutions under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991; how many have resulted in convictions; and how many dogs responsible for attacks were not ordered to be destroyed. [125648]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 July 2003]:* It is not possible, in the statistics collected centrally, to identify those prosecutions initiated by local authorities.

The available information, relating to all prosecutions and convictions under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 in England and Wales between 1992 and 2001 is given in the table.

Figures for 2002 will be available in the autumn.

Details of cases where dogs responsible for attacks are not destroyed are not collected centrally.

Defendants[1] proceeded against at magistrates' courts and convicted at all courts for offences under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, England and Wales 1992–2001

Year	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*
1992	1,222	575
1993	984	434
1994	617	260
1995	554	220
1996	449	159
1997	504	241
1998	764	406
1999	802	442
2000[2]	823	446
2001	886	522

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

[2] Staffordshire Police were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates' court for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data these data are not robust at a detailed level and have been excluded from this table.

DCS Ellie Baker

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what progress is being made in the internal police investigation into the conduct of Detective Chief Superintendent Ellie Baker; [123695]

(2) if he will list *(a)* the name, *(b)* rank and *(c)* length of time for which they have been involved in the investigation of each officer involved in the internal police investigation of Detective Chief Superintendent Ellie Baker; [123696]

(3) whether compensation will be paid to Detective Chief Superintendent Ellie Baker for the criminal investigation into her conduct. [123697]

Ms Blears: The West Midlands Police inform me that the internal investigation is drawing to a close. Independent legal advice has been sought and shared with the Police Complaints Authority, who are currently considering further written representations submitted by Detective Chief Superintendent (DCS) Baker in May, before they make their recommendations on whether she should face misconduct proceedings.

The West Midlands Police inform me that the overall Senior Investigating Officer is Mr. Robert Quick, formerly a Commander of the Metropolitan Police Service and now the Deputy Chief Constable of Surrey Constabulary. Mr. Robert Quick has been involved in the case since the outset in November 2002. Other officers who have been involved in the internal investigation of DCS Baker are from the respective Professional Standards Units of the West Midlands Police and the Metropolitan Police Service and include ranks from Detective Constable up to Detective Superintendent. As these officers are often involved in covert policing methods investigating acts of serious corruption and unethical behaviour, the West Midlands Police do not wish to disclose their names and details publicly.

The West Midlands Police advise me, however, that DCS Baker is aware of the actual identities of many of the officers involved in the investigation and, in particular, those who have performed key roles.

At present the West Midlands Police consider that they would have no cause to pay compensation to DCS Baker.

Departmental Policies (Pendle)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what policies *(a)* initiated and *(b)* managed by his Department since 2001 have had an impact on Pendle; and if he will make a statement. [124093]

Ms Blears: Most of the policies initiated by the Home Office since 2001 have had an impact on Pendle as on other parts of the country. Our policies in the areas of crime reduction, community cohesion and policing are providing direct benefits to the people of Pendle, as follows.

1. Crime Reduction Initiatives

Initiatives that have been funded in Pendle for crime reduction purposes

£

Name of initiative		*Total amount of funding awarded*
CCTV	2001–02	201,000
Communities against drugs	2001–02 and 2002–03	169,600
Safer communities initiative	2002–03	32,125
Partnership Development Fund (PDF)	2002–03	20,000
Small Retailers in Deprived Areas (SRDA)	2001–02, 2002–03 and 2003–04	71,698
Building Safer Communities Fund (BSC)	2003–04	120,867
Basic Command Unit Fund (BCU)[1]	2003–04	[1]214,571
Total		(inclusive BCU) 829,861
		(exclusive BCU) 615,290

[1] BCU allocation is for the Pennine BCU which includes Burnley, Rossendale and Pendle. The allocation will be used across the BCU area; it is not possible to quantify how much will be utilised in Pendle itself.

Interventions funded by crime reduction allocations included: a town centre Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) system, targeted policing operations, mobile CCTV, an initiative on tackling domestic violence, supporting youth mentoring, installation of security improvements and funding community support workers.

2. Community Cohesion Initiatives

The Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme, launched by the Home Office and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in October 2002, aims to build examples of areas that are successfully mainstreaming community cohesion into all their core service delivery functions. The programme encompasses local authorities, the community and voluntary sector, and communities themselves. Pendle is one of the five authorities (together with Lancashire County Council, Burnley Borough Council, Hyndburn Borough Council, and Rossendale Borough Council) which make up the successful East Lancashire Community Cohesion Pathfinder. This will receive a total of £285,000 to spend in the period February 2003 to October 2004.

The Home Office Community Cohesion Unit has worked closely with the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit of the ODPM, and through Government offices has funded community cohesion-focused activities for children and young people during the summer of 2001 and 2002 (in 2003 this has become incorporated into a single funded inter-Departmental programme). In 2001 around £7 million was provided for summer activities.

Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP)

On 29 October 2002, the Street Crime Action Group (SCAG) commissioned the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Culture, Media and

Sport (DCMS) to report on the evaluation of summer activities in 2002 and on progress on simplifying funding.

In December, SCAG approved the key design features and objectives of the new programme based on a simplified single pot for funding. The confirmed total funding pot for 2003–04 is £24.7 million. The formula for the new programme, which for the first time is being developed in each Local Education Authority (LEA) area in the North West, is a national one. It is based on three indicators of need: levels of truancy, offending rates (specifically rates of robbery), and the numbers of young people aged 8–19 in each area.

It is not possible to provide a figure for Pendle, but each Government office has the flexibility to adjust the allocations by up to 15 per cent. of the regional total. The allocation to Lancashire has been increased by over £115,000 and GO-NW staff are looking to the LEA to take forward enhanced activities in east Lancashire in Burnley, Pendle and Hyndburn.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit of the ODPM and Government offices have also funded the community facilitation programme, under which regional co-ordinators have been appointed to undertake conflict resolution work where tensions are identified, and to strengthen existing capacity for conflict resolution. This programme has raised the profile of community cohesion at the regional and local level and facilitated the building of relationships and partnerships between agencies to address community cohesion and conflict. It has successfully supported the development of new approaches to addressing community conflicts.

3. Police Initiatives

Pendle, Rossendale and Burnley are boroughs within the Pennine division of the Lancashire constabulary. Lancashire as a whole has benefited from a £0.06 million rural policing grant. Each borough has its own Chief Inspector answering to the Chief Superintendent of Pennine Division. The force has informed us that the borough Pendle has benefited from the following Government initiatives.

Government initiatives funding

£000

	2000–01	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*Total*
Crime Fighting Fund (CFF)	86	169	197	240	692
Community Support Officers			30	50	80
Street Crime			[1]70		70

[1] This is an equal portion of the 210,000 allocated to the Pennine Division

Fly Tipping

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the steps the Government will take to improve detection and prosecution rates in conjunction with the planned sentencing review for fly tipping. [125126]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The environmental sentencing review is looking at sentencing from a broad perspective and is principally concerned with the sentence given to a particular offence, rather than preventative measures taken against it. We expect the results by the end of June.

Specific measures to help tackle fly tipping have been proposed in the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill. If successful, the provisions will allow local authorities to stop, search and seize vehicles suspected of being used for fly tipping, and to investigate incidents to help them track and prosecute those responsible for dumping waste. The Bill will also give the Secretary of State the power to issue statutory directions to the Environment Agency and local authorities on the types of fly tipping incidents with which they deal.

Further research into fly tipping will be carried out later this year that will focus on better enforcement, prevention and deterrents.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government will earmark revenue from increases to fines for fly tipping for local authorities to spend on detection of fly tipping offences and prevention measures. [125127]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The issue of income from fines and whether this can be recycled to enforcement bodies to fund preventative action is a matter for Her Majesty's Treasury.

Defra is however considering whether there is scope for using fixed penalty notice to help enforce duty of care legislation in particular.

Immigration Facilities

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 25 June 2003, *Official Report,* column 866W on immigration holding cells, which independent bodies are responsible for inspecting the police and immigration facilities listed; and when the last inspection took place in each case. [124983]

Beverley Hughes: Independent custody visiting is the new name for lay visiting, the well established system where volunteers attend police stations to check on the treatment of detainees and the conditions in which they are held. Unannounced visits are made at varying times of the day and night, with volunteers having immediate access to the custody area. Heathrow and Stansted police stations were visited most recently on 14 and 25 June, respectively.

Immigration holding rooms at ports are not at present subject to independent oversight. However, we have very recently invited Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, which performs a similar role in relation to immigration removal centres, to take on an inspection function for immigration short-term holding facilities, including holding rooms at ports, and we will be discussing with them the arrangements by which they might do so.

Overstayers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people leaving the UK in the last two years were found to have overstayed the duration of their *(a)* visa and *(b)* work permit. [124982]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is unavailable.

Passports

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total number of United Kingdom passports in circulation was in each of the last 10 years. [124974]

Beverley Hughes: The total number of five year/10 year United Kingdom passports in circulation in each of the last 10 years is shown in the table:

	Number of passports
1992	24,302,691
1993	25,767,518
1994	27,808,451
1995	30,465,987
1996	33,596,434
1997	36,824,681
1998	38,609,485
1999	41,591,838
2000	43,608,145
2001	45,856,658
2002	47,383,796

It should be noted that the UK Passport Service is not notified in every case of the death of a passport holder so these figures include some valid passports for deceased persons.

Police

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the targets on which basic command units in each constabulary are assessed on a *(a)* quarterly and *(b)* annual basis. [124433]

Ms Blears: The Home Office have not asked basic command units to set crime reduction targets. All police authorities have set targets for the reduction of vehicle crime and domestic burglary. In addition, the 10 police authorities involved in the street crime initiative have been asked to set targets for the reduction of robbery.

It is for individual police authorities and forces to decide whether they would like their basic command units to set targets.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces in England are smaller than the City of Nottingham Division of the Nottinghamshire Constabulary. [124997]

Ms Blears: Information provided in June last year by the Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire Police, Mr. Stephen Green QPM, showed that Nottingham City Division had 789 police officers. Only the City of London Police force was smaller with 764 officers in March 2002.

Police National Computer

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements have been made to pass data from the Police National Computer to non-Home Department police forces which do not have direct access; and what procedures exist to ensure data protection requirements are complied with in such circumstances. [124945]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 July 2002]:* Access by non-Home Department police forces to the Police National Computer is either through secure police national computer terminals in those forces or through Home Department police forces.

Non-Home Department police forces have to meet the same stringent data protection procedures and requirements that apply to Home Department forces.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which non-Home Department police forces have direct access to the Police National Computer. [124946]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 July 2003]:* The non-Home Department police force listed have direct access to the Police National Computer.

British Transport;
States of Jersey;
Guernsey;
Northern Ireland;
Isle of Man;
Ministry of Defence;
Port of Dover;
RAF Provost;
Royal Military Police (Army Provost); and
UK Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary.

Police Numbers

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the number of police officers, *(b)* the ratio of police officers to residents, *(c)* the amount of Government funding received, *(d)* the amount of Government funding per resident, *(e)* the precept levied on a Band D property and *(f)* the overall sum raised by the precept for each police authority in England in the last year for which figures are available. [116897]

Ms Blears: The information requested is provided in the table.

	(a) Number of police officers[1]	*(b) Police/ population*[2]	*(c) Government funding*[3] *£ million*	*(d) Funding per resident £ million*	*(e) Precept on band D property (£)*	*(f) Revenue raised through precept £ million*[4]
Avon and Somerset	3,119	476	167.15	113	111.6	58.63
Bedfordshire	1,086	522	63.73	113	93.4	18.03
Cambridgeshire	1,398	508	75.95	107	113.3	28.04
Cheshire	2,075	474	113.44	115	88.1	31.32
Cleveland	1,488	364	87.43	162	120.2	19.54
Cumbria	1,112	439	61.43	126	130.7	21.84
Derbyshire	1,970	486	103.74	108	111.8	34.88
Devon and Cornwall	3,145	502	172.41	109	103.3	58.23

	(a) Number of police officers[1]	(b) Police/ population[2]	(c) Government funding[3] £ million	(d) Funding per resident £ million	(e) Precept on band D property (£)	(f) Revenue raised through precept £ million[4]
Dorset	1,402	495	64.94	94	123.4	33.80
Durham	1,655	358	85.23	144	79.6	14.14
Essex	2,988	541	165.55	102	93.0	56.51
Gloucestershire	1,171	482	60.88	108	142.6	29.64
Greater Manchester	7,352	338	403.88	163	91.7	69.77
Hampshire	3,592	495	201.03	113	97.3	62.80
Hertfordshire	1,902	544	105.74	102	98.3	41.36
Humberside	2,114	411	116.69	134	113.0	30.67
Kent	3,434	460	193.37	122	95.0	55.88
Lancashire	3,378	419	185.78	131	87.6	39.56
Leicestershire	2,086	443	104.31	113	104.8	31.02
Lincolnshire	1,214	534	63.69	98	104.4	22.31
Merseyside	4,118	331	255.88	188	101.5	42.25
Metropolitan Police[5]	27,645	260	1,902.88	265	159.1	443.75
Norfolk	1,481	539	88.54	111	122.0	33.70
Northamptonshire	1,202	525	68.53	109	130.1	27.73
Northumbria	4,006	345	223.58	162	63.8	26.56
North Yorkshire	1,404	535	75.26	100	156.0	43.58
Nottinghamshire	2,397	424	131.49	129	109.3	34.37
South Yorkshire	3,217	394	185.35	146	94.3	34.38
Staffordshire	2,169	483	115.45	110	126.5	43.06
Suffolk	1,228	545	68.29	102	109.4	25.67
Surrey	1,986	533	93.33	88	135.1	63.75
Sussex	2,933	510	163.05	109	97.7	57.89
Thames Valley	3,830	546	220.83	106	106.2	86.13
Warwickshire	1,007	503	52.97	105	117.3	22.07
West Mercia	2,048	566	112.25	97	119.8	49.66
West Midlands	7,855	325	422.27	165	71.2	54.53
West Yorkshire	4,999	416	306.48	147	88.8	56.08
Wiltshire	1,167	526	62.41	102	109.7	25.18
Total for England	122,373	409	7,145.21	145	—	1,928.31

[1] Officers at 30 September 2002.
[2] Population per police officer.
[3] Government funding shown is revenue police and specific grants and RSG/NNDR. Police authorities also received capital grant of £117 million and supplementary credit approvals (grant supported borrowing authority) of £73 million, plus, £12 million loan charges grant as support for costs of capital incurred before 1990.
[4] Data on precepts in columns *(e)* and *(f)* provided by ODPM. The average Band D property rate (per household) is £109 for shire authorities and £84 for metropolitan authorities (excluding the GLA) in respect of 2003–04.
[5] City of London police numbers and police specific grant information is included with the Metropolitan police. Precept information relates to MPA only.
[6] Remaining specific grants funds of £201 million have not yet been allocated.

Police Vehicle Accidents

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) of 10 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 821W, on police vehicle accidents, how many road traffic accidents there were, broken down by category of incident, including accidents which did not involve another vehicle. [124994]

Ms Blears: Police force statistical returns do not separately identify police vehicle accidents by category of incident.

Policing

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in post in Leicestershire Police Authority in *(a)* each year between 1991–92 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [125256]

Ms Blears: The information is set out in the table.

Leicestershire police authority

At 31 March	Police strength	Civilian support staff strength
1992	1,845	676
1993	1,805	661
1994	1,825	646
1995	1,839	679
1996	1,908	667
1997	1,949	755
1998	1,983	774
1999	1,993	802
2000	1,993	805
2001	2,033	806
2002	2,100	816
2002 (30 September)	2,086	n/a

Police officer strength in Leicestershire has increased by 137 since March 1997. This is an increase of seven per cent. and is significantly higher than the national increase for the same period of 3.4 per cent.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to create a separate police force for the city of Nottingham. [125154]

Ms Blears: The Secretary of State may make alterations to the boundaries of police areas by order under sections 32 to 34 of the Police Act 1996. He may only do so if he has either received a request to make alterations from the relevant police authority or authorities or if it seems to him that it is expedient to make changes in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness. I have received no such request from Nottinghamshire Police Authority nor am I aware of any evidence that indicates that the policing of either the city of Nottingham or the county of Nottinghamshire would be improved by creating a separate force for the city.

Robberies

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to revise his Department's target for the reduction of robberies. [124960]

Ms Blears: The national Public Service Agreement (PSA) target is to reduce robbery in the 10 street crime initiative areas by 14 per cent. from 1999–2000 to 2005, and maintain that level. The Government has no current plans to revise the target.

Rural Proofing

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Chairman of the Countryside Agency to discuss rural proofing. [115580]

Fiona Mactaggart: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael), on 12 June 2003, *Official Report*, Column 1017W. Ministers in the Home Office arrange meetings with Ministers in the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and with the Chairman of the Countryside Agency (Ewen Cameron) at regular intervals to discuss rural affairs. At the last such meeting, on 3 February this year, Ewen Cameron, Alun Michael and my hon. Friend Bob Ainsworth met to discuss Home Office policy on rural affairs and rural proofing.

Savitaben Hasmukbhai Patel

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the case of Savitaben Hasmukbhai Patel born 12 July 1947, sent to the Integrated Casework Directorate in Liverpool on 28 May by recorded delivery (no. RE620118685GB); and when a decision will be made on the application. [122793]

Beverley Hughes: The application was decided on 27 June.

Senior Departmental Posts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many senior departmental posts were advertised in each year since June 1999; and how many of those were advertised in the Scottish press. [120667]

Fiona Mactaggart: Specific records of the number of posts advertised are not maintained by the Home Office. Following investigations we have been able to ascertain that two senior posts were advertised in 2000; three were advertised in 2001; three in 2002 and three have been advertised to date in 2003. The figures for 1999 are not available.

Posts are advertised in the British press. The Home Office, as a department whose functions are primarily England and Wales, has not advertised posts in newspapers or journals published only in Scotland.

Street Crime Initiative

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the cost of the street crime initiative. [124989]

Ms Blears: On 1 May 2002 my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced that £67 million had been allocated to tackle Street Crime in 2002–03. On 5 December 2002 the Home Secretary announced that a further £25 million would be provided in 2003–04 to support continued police operations against street crime.

In addition, a number of other funding streams and work programmes both within the Home Office and from other Government Departments, have contributed directly and indirectly to tackling street crime. Most of these programmes have, however, had broader agendas, and it is not possible therefore to attribute a precise cost to the street crime element.

Street Crime Initiative

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which sponsor ministers are attached to each of the 10 street crime areas; and when each minister visited his allocated area in the last six months. [124988]

Ms Blears: The information requested is included in the table:

Area	*Minister*	*Dates of visits*
London	John Denham (Home Office)	20 February 2003
	From July 2003: Hazel Blears (Home Office) Ivan Lewis (Department for Education and Skills)	
Greater Manchester	Lord Falconer (Department for Constitutional Affairs)	12 February 2003 23 May 2003
Merseyside	Yvette Cooper (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister)	20 February 2003
West Yorkshire	Hilary Benn (Department for International Development)	24 April 2003

Area	Minister	Dates of visits
South Yorkshire	Ivan Lewis (Department for Education and Skills)	21 January 2003 8 April 2003 21 May 2003 11 June 2003
Thames Valley	Barbara Roche (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister)	13 January 2003
	From July 2003 Chris Leslie (Department for Constitutional Affairs)	
Avon and Somerset	Baroness Blackstone (Department for Culture, Media and Sport)	21 February 2003 9 May 2003
	From July 2003 Estelle Morris (Department for Culture Media and Sport)	
Lancashire	Hazel Blears (Home Office)	6 February 2003
Nottinghamshire	Ruth Kelly (Her Majesty's Treasury)	16 January 2003 3 April 2003
	From July 2003 Melanie Johnson (Department of Health)	
West Midlands	Lord Rooker (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister)	6 June 2003

Vehicle Crime

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce vehicle crime. [125009]

Ms Blears: In September 1998, the Government announced a target to reduce vehicle crime by 30 per cent. over five years. The Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team (VCRAT) was set up at the same time to develop and oversee the implementation of initiatives to meet this target. They published their strategy on 22 September 1999.

Their main proposals included improved security of new and used cars, improved car park security, better policing and community responses which targeted prolific offenders and crime hotspots, improved vehicle registration procedures, statutory regulation of the motor salvage industry and a publicity campaign to get vehicle crime prevention messages across to the public. Good progress is being made in implementing all these initiatives and some have been developed further. For example, work is in hand to make further improvements to vehicle registration procedures and we are working more closely with some local authorities and voluntary and community groups to get across vehicle crime prevention messages.

The latest published British Crime Survey shows that, from interviews in the year to December 2002, there were an estimated 2,306,000 vehicle crimes (i.e. thefts of or from vehicles or attempts). This is a reduction of 703,000 offences (23 per cent.) against the baseline of the British Crime Survey 2000 (which estimated crime in 1999).

Vehicle Recovery

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vehicles were recovered by recovery agents contracted to police forces in each of the last 10 years; and at what cost. [124984]

Ms Blears: This information is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Voluntary Sector

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of how the voluntary sector will be affected if people work to an older age in paid employment. [124583]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Government published 'Equality and Diversity: Age Matters' on 2 July 2003. It seeks views on proposals for the implementation of new anti-discrimination law under the European Employment Directive. It is the first consultation to focus exclusively on proposals for age legislation. The Department of Trade and Industry is the lead department on this matter and The Active Community Unit have been invited to respond.

Information gleaned from the Home Office Citizenship Survey 2000, shows that employed people have a higher propensity to volunteer and the development of the Corporate Challenge, launched on 7 July 2003, will contribute to increasing the number of employee-supported volunteering opportunities.

Work Permits

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many work permits were granted in 2002 for unskilled occupations. [123781]

Beverley Hughes: None. Work permits were not issued for unskilled work in 2002.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many work permits were granted in the first six months of 2003 for unskilled occupations. [123782]

Beverley Hughes: No work permits were issued for unskilled work in the first quarter of 2003. Figures for the second quarter will not be available until end of August 2003.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Domestic Violence Helpline

Lady Hermon: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the 24-hour national helpline for victims of domestic violence will be available in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on its operations. [121259]

Yvette Cooper: A national 24-hour telephone helpline service for victims of domestic violence already exists in Northern Ireland. This is run by the Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland (NIWAF). It offers advice, support and crisis intervention for abused women, as well as information and guidance to all agencies relating to specific cases. The experienced and trained staff receive around 35,000 calls a year.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is also working with Comic Relief on the production of an online information system that will be available for domestic violence service providers and the major helpline services across the UK. This will enable NIWAF to provide key information to people who call the helpline in Northern Ireland more quickly than before, and with the most up to date data on refuge vacancies, so people can be directed to the most appropriate support quickly and effectively.

Homeless Families

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on recent progress made in finding permanent homes for homeless families in priority need. [125853]

Yvette Cooper: The Homelessness Directorate in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister aims to foster sustainable communities by tackling homelessness more effectively and, in particular, delivering the Government's target to:

> end the use of B&B hotels for homeless families with children, except in short-term emergencies by March 2004.

The Directorate has a budget of £260 million over the three years 2003–04 to 2005–06, most of which will be allocated to local authorities in support of their homelessness strategies, which they must have in place by 30 July 2003. The strategy must aim to prevent homelessness and ensure that accommodation and support are available for people who become homeless or are at risk of doing so. This funding will also assist local authorities in their efforts to tackle B&B use.

The Directorate is investing £17 million over 2003/04/05 to support London & Quadrant Housing Trust to provide around 500 family houses for homeless households. Homes are being funded within the Housing Corporation's Social Housing Grant regime across a number of London boroughs where there are currently high numbers of black and minority ethnic households in temporary accommodation including B&B hotels.

Affordable housing has a vital role to play in tackling homelessness. As detailed in the Sustainable Communities Plan, £5 billion is being invested in affordable housing over the next three years. This will make a further contribution to preventing homelessness and moving families out of B&B.

In 2003–04 we are increasing the funding for the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme to around £1.5 billion in 2003–04 to provide homes for both rent and low cost home ownership—an increase of £500 million on last year. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister expect the Housing Corporation's programme, including the Challenge Fund in London and South-east England, to deliver around 22,000 homes this year.

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what criteria were used by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund to select the five resorts chosen for the award of £30 million over three years; and for what reason the selection was limited to five authorities. [124763]

Yvette Cooper: The Indices of Deprivation 2000 (ID2000) have been used to determine Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) eligibility and the basis of distribution of the grant between eligible authorities. The Department decided that those authorities that appear within the top 50 most deprived districts on any of the six district level measures in the ID2000 should be eligible for the NRF. On this basis 81 authorities are eligible. It was also decided that there should be transitional arrangements for those authorities that were within the 50 most deprived areas on any of the four measures under the old Index of Local Deprivation, but are not in the list of 81 authorities that qualify using the ID2000. Therefore, a further seven local authority areas are eligible for the Fund. The 88 local authorities that are eligible for NRF and the amounts allocated to each authority in 2003/04 are listed in Annex A of the Special Grant Report 111 (SGR 111).

The sum to be allocated to each authority is based on a standard amount per head of population in those wards in the authority that are in the most deprived 10 per cent. of all wards nationally, with a minimum allocation in 2003–04 of £400,000 for any eligible authority. This relates an authority's grant funding to the severity of deprivation within its area, measured by the number of their residents living in particularly deprived areas.

Affordable Homes

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many affordable homes have been built; and how much has been spent in each constituency in each year since 1997. [125565]

Keith Hill: Information on the number of affordable homes built since 1997 and the expenditure is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the actions his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are taking to comply with the requirements of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002; whether he has made an estimate of the cost of compliance; and if he will make a statement. [117711]

Yvette Cooper: Preparations for compliance with the new duties in respect of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002 are under way across the estate of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Records of the estimated costs of compliance are not yet available.

Bed-and-breakfast Accommodation

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* women and *(b)* men were in bed-and-breakfast accommodation on 31 March. [125023]

Yvette Cooper: A summary of information being collected from local authorities on the type and gender of homeless households in bed and breakfast accommodation as at 31 March 2003 will be available later in the year in due course.

Departmental Policies (Pendle)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what policies *(a)* initiated and *(b)* managed by his Department since 2001 have had an impact on Pendle; and if he will make a statement. [124091]

Yvette Cooper: The principal kinds of funding which this department has provided to Pendle since 2001 are tabled.

£

Policies	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Revenue Support Grant	3.9 million	4.3 million	4.3 million	5.4 million
Redistributed National Non Domestic Rates	3.2 million	3.1 million	3.5 million	3.1 million
Central Government Capital Grant	1.0 million	1.7 million	0.4 million	0.4 million
Credit Approvals Available (covers housing, transport, social services, education)	3.0 million	1.5 million	2.3 million	2.7 million
Neighbourhood Renewal Fund	Note[1]	1.0 million	1.5 million	2.0 million
Community Empowerment Fund	Note[1]	115,000	115,000	115,000
Community Chest	Note[1]	77.5,000	116,000	179,500
Community Chest	Note[1]	77,500	116,000	179,500
Community Learning Chest	Note[1]	Note[1]	31,000	46,500
European Funding	Note[2]			

[1] Neighbourhood Renewal Funding, Community Chest and Community Empowerment Fund were not available until 2001–02 and Community Learning Chest was not available until 2001–02.
[2] Pendle has transition status under the 2000–06 NW Objective 2 programme. Since 2001, the East Lancashire Partnership has been allocated £13 million ERDF for its transition areas for business support activity. The Pendle Partnership has also been allocated £2.6 million ERDF for its community development programme.
[3] Pendle will also benefit from a proportion of the Housing Market Renewal Fund. This is a long-term project that will identify ways to tackle problems of housing low demand and abandonment in East Lancashire.

EU Regulations

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many regulations originating from the EU have been implemented by his Department over each of the last five years. [120862]

Yvette Cooper: No new European Union regulations have been implemented by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister since its creation in May 2002. We continue to implement existing regulations including those relating to structural funds.

Funding (Sefton)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which wards and programmes since 1997 within Sefton have benefited from *(a)* capital investment in housing, *(b)* major repairs allowance, *(c)* disabled facilities grants, *(d)* Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, *(e)* Community Empowerment Fund, *(f)* Community Chest and Community Learning Chests, *(g)* the Objective One Programme, *(h)* the Objective Two Programme, *(i)* the Objective Three Programme, *(j)* the Community Champions Fund, *(k)* Pathfinder Young Community Champions Fund, *(l)* Sustainable Development Regional Promotional Budget, *(m)* Renewable Energy Programme, *(n)* Building Safer Communities, *(o)* Wardens Scheme, *(p)* Small Retailer in Deprived Areas, *(q)* Partnership Development and *(r)* Partnership Support Programme since 1997. [124386]

Yvette Cooper: Due to the nature of the grants it is difficult to break down allocated funds to specific wards. Here are the programmes that have received funding:

(a) £4.852 million (2003–4).

(b) £7.37 million (2002–03), £7.191 million (2003–04).

(c) £713,000 (2002–03), £720,000 (2003–04).

All the above can be borough wide. Major repairs allowance is only for use on local authority stock.

(d) £12.671 million (2001–04), £16,893 (2004–06)—Neighbourhood Renewal Fund is not prescribed, but intended for spend in the most deprived wards.

(e) £435,423 (2001–04), £290,282 (2004–06)—for use to set up a borough-wide community network.

(f) £651,015 (2001–04), £657,050 (2004–06) Community Chest.

£128,996 (2001–04), £154,796 (2004–06) Community Learning Chests.

(g) The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not hold information on levels of European funding at ward level. Also, as the Objective One programme is Merseyside-wide in scope, a substantial amount of programme-funded activity will be delivered by organisations that have a pan-Merseyside remit. A project based in one particular area (often at the organisations head office) will therefore draw beneficiaries, or have benefits, and spend money outside

its immediate locality. However, Sefton will benefit from the £160 million invested through Objective One in Merseyside in 2002.

(h) Areas that receive Objective One monies are not eligible for either Objective Two or Objective Three funding, therefore, it is nil return.

(i) See above.

(j) There are seven Community Champions receiving a total of £7,257.09.

Current Community Champions include:

Colette Sheerin Oscroft, No. 35—£416; Tony Roberts, No. 63—£1,000; Ian Mackinson, No. 65—£180; Margi Robinson, No. 73—£1,209.82; Mary French, No. 74—£457.50; John Cunningham, No. 76—£2,000; Eileen Green, No. 100—£1,993.77.

(k) Nil return. Sefton does not receive Pathfinder Young CC as they are not an eligible area. DfES ran a national competitive bidding process which Sefton did not enter.

(l) £500 in 2000 to help the local authority with Local Agenda 21 issues.

(m) Between 1998 and 2002, Government Office for the North West employed an energy and environmental adviser who visited 87 businesses in the Sefton area promoting environmental management and resource efficiency. This cost GONW approximately £9,000.

(n) Sefton has been awarded £298,500 (2003–4).

(o) There are no Wardens Schemes being managed by GONW in Sefton at present.

(p) £21,000 (2001–02), £29,000 2002–03, £29,000 2003–04. Match funding has also been obtained for all three years from the South Sefton Partnership and all South Sefton wards have been benefited.

(q) £50,000 awarded for the years 2001–03.

(r) Allocated on a regional level for 2002–03. Awarded six days consultancy to Sefton CDRP to develop a partnership—Training Needs.

Growth Area Assessments

Phil Sawford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which *(a)* organisations and *(b)* consultants are carrying out the Growth Area Assessments in respect of the Milton Keynes and South Midland Study; and what the costs of these assessments are. [123973]

Yvette Cooper: Roger Tym and Partners in association with Halcrow and Three Dragons, DTZ Pieda Consulting and Faber Maunsell, and Entec UK Ltd. in association with Faber Maunsell and Bone Wells Associates carried out the Growth Area Assessments for local and regional partners. The total cost of these assessments was approximately £225,000.

Home Information Packs

Mr. Syms: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library the responses to the consultation on home information packs. [125043]

Keith Hill: Yes. Copies of responses to the consultation on the draft Housing Bill as well as the two complementary consultation papers "The home information pack in low demand low value areas" and "Contents of the home information pack" will be placed in the Library of the House in due course.

Homelessness

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many homeless families are in priority need in each local authority; [124667]

(2) how many homeless families in priority need are temporarily housed in each type of accommodation; [124679]

(3) what proportion of homeless families in priority need have children; and how many *(a)* children and *(b)* children under five are members of such families; [124681]

(4) what proportion of members of homeless families in priority need *(a)* have criminal records and *(b)* are on a drug rehabilitation scheme; [124682]

(5) what proportion of homeless families in priority need have a family member who is registered unemployed. [124683]

Yvette Cooper: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's latest Statistical Release on statutory homelessness, covering figures for England up to the end of March 2003, was published on 17 June 2003.

Information summarised in Table 4 shows that 129,320 households were accepted as homeless and in priority need by local authorities in England during 2002–03. In some 53 per cent. of these cases the presence of a dependent child or children in the household was cited as the most relevant factor in determining priority need. It is estimated that these families contained some 115,000 children; no information is collected centrally on the ages of children.

Table 7 shows that on 31 March 2003, 90,680 homeless households were in some form of temporary accommodation arranged by local authorities. This includes households accommodated pending the local authority's decision on the application.

An expanded breakdown of all homelessness decisions, acceptances and numbers in various types of temporary accommodation as reported by individual local authorities is presented in Supplementary Tables accompanying the Statistical Release.

Information about the number of people in households accepted as homeless who have criminal records, are in a drug rehabilitation scheme or are unemployed, is not collected centrally.

National and regional PIE-based figures—which include estimates for non-responding local authorities—appear in a quarterly Statistical Release, available in the Library and via the ODPM website. An accompanying Supplementary Table presents key data at regional and local authority level. The ODPM website link is: http://www.housing.odpm.gov.uk/statistics/publicat/homelessness/index.htm#quarterly

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of homeless families in priority need have a family member registered disabled. [124696]

Yvette Cooper: During 2002/03, local authorities in England accepted over 129,000 households as being homeless and in priority need. Precise information on the number of these containing a person registered as disabled is not collected centrally, and could only be

provided at disproportionate cost. However, in some 7,000 (5 per cent) of these cases the vulnerability of a household member due to a physical disability was reported as the most relevant factor in determining priority need; in a further 11,000 (9 per cent.) cases a mental illness or disability was considered the most relevant.

Although a household may be eligible under more than one priority need category, authorities are only asked to record the one which they deemed most relevant to their decision. It is possible that some households which were accepted because, for example, there were dependent children would also contain a person with a physical or mental disability.

The above statistics are included in the latest quarterly Statistical Release on statutory homelessness, issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 17 June and covering statistics up to end March 2003. Copies are available in the library of the House.

Ms. Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to commission an inquiry into the *(a)* experiences and *(b)* causes of hidden homelessness in response to the recommendation contained in the Executive Summary of Housing and BME communities: A review of the evidence base. [124705]

Yvette Cooper: Following publication for the first time in September 2002 of local authority homelessness statistics in relation to homelessness amongst black and minority ethnic communities, the Homelessness Directorate in my Department commissioned research to investigate the causes of homelessness amongst people from different black and minority ethnic groups and whether existing homelessness services meet their needs. This work is focused on BME households who have been accepted by the local authority as having a priority need for accommodation, but will cover issues around what the review of evidence in relation to housing and black and minority ethnic communities referred to as "so-called hidden homelessness". The current research is due to report in the Autumn and will include good practice recommendations on effective responses to homelessness for people from different black and minority ethnic groups.

In addition to this research, the Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local authorities to conduct a review of homelessness and have a strategy based on that review. The first strategies must be in place by 30 July this year and must aim to prevent homelessness and ensure that accommodation and support are available for people who become homeless or are at risk of doing so. Statutory and good practice guidance issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister emphasises the need for reviews, strategies and homelessness services to address the needs of black and minority ethnic communities.

Earlier this year, the Homelessness Directorate sponsored a series of seminars around the country designed to help local authorities and other agencies engage with, and address the needs of, faith and black and minority ethnic communities in conducting homelessness reviews and developing homelessness strategies and services.

A breakdown of homelessness amongst black and minority ethnic groups is now published quarterly with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's regular statistical release on homelessness. The Homelessness Directorate will keep the extent of homelessness amongst black and minority ethnic communities, and the evidence base relating to that, under review.

Housing

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many houses in Shrewsbury and Atcham are second homes for *(a)* local and *(b)* out of area residents. [125627]

Keith Hill: According to the 2001 Census there were 189 second homes in Shrewsbury and Atcham. Information is not available on whether they were owned by local or out of town residents.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the prudential framework will be available to local housing authorities. [126129]

Keith Hill: The Government's hope is to introduce the prudential borrowing system for all local authorities on 1 April 2004. However, that depends upon early completion of the remaining Parliamentary stages of the Local Government Bill, which is currently before the House of Lords.

NDPBs

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [121793]

Yvette Cooper: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister sponsors seven advisory non-departmental public bodies. Of these:

a) the Boundary Commission for England and the Boundary Commission for Wales hold public meetings. This is a statutory requirement;

b) the Advisory Panel on Beacon Councils, the Boundary Commission for England and the Boundary Commission for Wales conduct public consultation exercises. This is a statutory requirement for the Boundary Commissions;

c) no advisory non-departmental public bodies conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests. This is not a statutory requirement;

d) the Community Forum, Boundary Commission for England and Boundary Commission for Wales voluntarily publish a register of members' interests. In addition the Advisory Panel on Beacon Councils, Building Regulations Advisory Committee and the Property Advisory Group keep a register which can be made available on request;

e) no advisory non-departmental public bodies publish agendas for meetings. This is not a statutory requirement;

f) no advisory non-departmental public bodies publish minutes of meetings. This is not a statutory requirement.

All of these bodies are subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which requires each of them to put in place a Publication Scheme by February 2004 for classes of material that they intend to

publish. They will also need to comply with the access to information provisions of the Act when it comes fully into force at the start of 2005.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much has been paid by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies, non-departmental public bodies and other organisations for which he is accountable to staff or former staff in respect of (i) alleged equal opportunities breaches which did not proceed to tribunals or courts and (ii) equal opportunities breaches which proceeded to tribunals or courts in (A) the current year and (B) each of the two previous years; and how many staff received payments in each case. [121795]

Yvette Cooper: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was established on 29 May 2002. Since that date, one allegation of breach of equal pay legislation was settled before proceedings were issued.

In addition, two allegations of racial discrimination were settled after proceedings had been issued.

Two further cases arose in an executive NDPB and were settled before proceeding to tribunal or court; allegations of breach of equal opportunities rules formed only part of these.

It would be inappropriate to give financial details of the settlements, which are confidential to the individuals concerned.

There have been no cases citing equal opportunity breaches raised in the executive agencies, or other organisations for which the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is accountable.

Neighbourhood Warden Schemes

Mr. Wood: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what funding is available to enable successful neighbourhood warden schemes to continue. [124623]

Yvette Cooper: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is keen that all funded schemes continue. However, Government funding for warden schemes was awarded on a short-term basis, and it was clear from the start that this financial support would only be for a limited period. With this in mind the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is working closely with all schemes in the development of their future sustainability plans. Events are being held and guidance has been produced to assist scheme managers achieve sustainability for their warden schemes.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister continues to promote the wardens approach, particularly as a key element of neighbourhood management, and where possible will do all that is necessary to help successful schemes continue.

New Posts

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what new, additional positions have been created in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister since May 2002. [121809]

Yvette Cooper: Since its creation in May 2002, the Office of the Deputy Minister has been reorganising internally to ensure its structure is the most appropriate to meet its objectives, and this has led to some posts being discontinued and some being created. All staff costs have been met within the Office of the Deputy Minister's administration budgets.

Pilots, Trials and Research Studies

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the pilots, trials and research studies funded by his Department which have been conducted since 2002, indicating *(a)* the title, summary and duration of the pilot or trial, *(b)* the target population and total number of participants and *(c)* when each pilot, trial or research finding was published; and if he will list the research bodies and organisations outside his Department which were involved in each pilot, trial or research study. [121777]

Yvette Cooper: Since 2002 the Office funded 68 projects of which four were pilots. The following pilots/trials were commissioned.

EHCS Follow Up Pilot with Local Authorities:

A Study in a selection of local authorities to identify the levels of information that local authorities could provide about dwellings on an individual basis, which will be used to inform the direction of future EHCS Postal Survey (or its replacement).

Let to: NFO Social Research
Started 27/5/03 ends 4/7/03
No Publications yet.
Target population—Local Authorities
Total No. of participants: 12

Home Condition Report (HCR)—Technical Pilot:

This aims to test the effectiveness (technical accuracy and consistency) of the HCR on a number of property types.

Let to: Building Research Establishment
Started 7/1/2003 ends 15/8/2003–06–25
No Publications yet.
Target population/participants: It involves 25 surveyors spread across the same four locations carrying out HCRs, (Cardiff, Coventry, Hertfordshire and Sheffield), on 20 "test" properties.

Home Condition Report Consumer Pilot/Surveyor Management contract: (Two contracts, but part of the same piece of work).

The research will pilot the Home Condition Report (HCR), an element of the proposed Home Information Pack, with consumers to explore their understanding and use of the HCR.

Let to: Building Research Establishment
Started 9/5/03 to 31/10/03
No Publications yet
Target population: Home buyers and sellers
Total no: of participants:

A total of 290 home buyers and sellers from four locations (Cardiff, Coventry, Hertfordshire and Sheffield). A total of 40 estate agents (10 in each of the above four locations) 22 surveyors (spread across the four locations).

The research projects commissioned by the Office since 2002 are listed in the following table with the research bodies and organisations involved.

Research Projects Commissioned by ODPM since 2002

Research Project	*Contractor*
Accessible Play Space	Inclusion, Childhood & Ed Research & Consultancy Ltd.
Alternative Funding for Stock Transfer	Howard Webb
Best value performance standards 2002–03	Llewelyn-Davies
Counting Gypsies and Travellers	University of Birmingham
Developing a planning aid fundraising strategy	RTPI
Developing a planning aid service in the south west region	RTPI
Developing alternative data sources for a national assessment of previously developed land	University of the West of England
EHCS Follow up Pilot with Local Authorities	NFO System Three
Evaluation of local Authority Bids for Gypsy Sites Refurbishment Grants in 2003–04	PriceWaterhouseCoopers
Ex-Post Evaluation of the England and Wales Leader II Programmes (1994–99)	Fraser Associates
Good Practice in Providing Homelessness Services for Households from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities	Ethnos
Guidance for Local Authorities on Appraisal of Options for investing in Council Housing	HACAS Chapman Hendy
Home Condition Report—Technical Pilot	Building Research Establishment
Home Condition Report Consumer Pilot: Surveyor Management Contract	Building Research Establishment
Home Ownership Solutions for Low Demand Areas	University of Birmingham
Housing Research Network	University of York
Improvements in social sector repair and maintenance procurement practice	The Housing Forum
International Literature Review to Establish the Current Extent of Knowledge of the Physiological Capabilities of Firelighters in Dealing With Incidents in The Natural and Built Environment.	Optimal Performance Ltd.
Land Value Change in the Four South East Growth Areas in the Community Plan	Steer Davies Gleave
Mid-Term Evaluation of Urban [illegible] Programmes in England	DTZ Pieda Consulting
Planning aid volunteer recruitment, retention and support	RTPI
Planning Research Network	CUDEM (Leeds Metropolitan Univ)
Possession Actions and Evictions by Social Landlords	University of Glasgow
Preventing and Resolving Conflicts in Communities Between Local Groups Divided on Racial Grounds	Lemos and Crane
Risk of fire and social exclusion	Ecotec
Section 38 Landlord and Tenant Act 1954—Failed Applications	University of Bristol
Short Report of the Fire Cover Review	Ubiqus Reporting UK
Short Term Consultancy Needs for Human Factors Expertise to Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate and Fire Research Division within the Fire Health Safety Directorate.	Dr. Stephen Cole
The Home Condition Report: Consumer Piloting	Building Research Establishment
The potential of a planning advisory service in England	Chris Shepley Planning
The Provision of Guidance on Methods of Forcible Entry.	Building Research Establishment
The relationship between transport and development in the Thames gateway	Llewelyn-Davies
The role of mediation in the planning process—international experience	Heriot-Watt University.
To Investigate the Increasing Value of Planning Appeals	Arup Economics & Planning
Urban & Neighbourhhod Studies Research Network	Economic and Social Research Council
Valuing the External Benefits of Undeveloped Land (Stage 2 of 3)	Eftec with ENTEC
Version 2 of the Housing Health & Safety Rating System	University of Warwick
Qualitative Case Studies to examine the perceived impact of policy on the lives of socially excluded households	Qualitative Research Unit, National Centre for Social Research
Scoping study for relative cost-effectiveness analysis of preventative *vs* palliative measures	Frontier Economics
Cost of interventions, long term costs of failure to address social exclusion among people with mental health problems	Personal Social Services Research Unit, LSE
Literature review "Mental Health and volunteering"	Institute for Volunteering and Research
Literature review of personal finances	Birmingham University
Literature Review of housing	Housing and Support Association
Literature review of arts/civic participation	University of Durham
Literature review of legal services	University of Central Lancashire
Literature review of healthy living	University College of Ripon and York St. John
Literature review of education and training	NIACE
Evaluation of the Deprived Urban Post Office Fund	The Centre for Enterprise and Economic Development Research, Middlesex University
Evaluation of the NRU's Community Participation Programme	University of West of England and Liverpool John Moores University
Evaluation of the NRU's Residents Consultancy Programme	Amion
Analysis of Approved Document P Consultation	White Maple Consulting
Review of the Operation and Impact of Approved Document B 2000 Amendments	Ove Arup
Impact of Business Led Regeneration—phase 2	Trends Business Research
Systematic review series—Local economies	CEEDR—Middlesex University
Evaluation of National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal Scoping Study	University of Cambridge
Annual Progress Report on Local Strategic Partnerships	York Consulting
Best Value Survey Indicators	Data Management and Analysis (ATP/Mori)
Decision making and Policy Development in New Council Constitutions: Emerging Good Practice	University of Birmingham De Montfort University
The Role of Staff in Delivering High Quality Public Services	PriceWaterhouseCoopers
Long term Evaluation of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda	University of Manchester

Research Projects Commissioned by ODPM since 2002

Research Project	*Contractor*
Evaluation of Intervention and Recovery Support Programmes	University of Birmingham
Research on Modelling the Cost of Local Government Reorganisation	PricewaterhouseCoopers
Scoping Work into Regional Governance Relationships	UCL
Single Capital Pot Baseline Research	York Consulting
Local Authority Use of the Bellwin Scheme Support	Bannock Consulting
Beacon Council Scheme: User Satisfaction with Service Delivery Contract Extension to cover round 5	Mori
Local Government Systems in Commonwealth Countries	CLGF

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Department's Regulatory Impact Assessment procedure; and how many RIAs have been reviewed in respect of the Department over the last year. [120864]

Yvette Cooper: A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) must be completed for all policy proposals that have a potential impact on businesses, charities or the voluntary sector. It includes details of the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating policy proposals and their impact.

From this year the National Audit Office (NAO) has a new role in independently evaluating a selection of RIAs. In their Annual Report, published in February 2003, the Better Regulation Task Force put forward suggestions of RIAs for the NAO to review.

The NAO review will focus on the quality of analysis in the RIAs and the thoroughness with which the RIAs have been undertaken. The findings and recommendations of best practice will be fed back to departments. It will play a valuable part in driving up standards of RIAs.

Sexual Dysfunction

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will commission a study by the Social Exclusion Unit into the impact of sexual dysfunction on social exclusion, with particular reference to those on low incomes with erectile dysfunction who are denied treatment on the NHS and cannot afford a private prescription. [123433]

Yvette Cooper: No. The SEU currently has a full work programme and is working on three major projects:

Improving the educational attainment of children in care;

Tackling social exclusion among adults with mental health problems; and

Removing barriers to jobs and enterprise in deprived areas.

The Social Exclusion Unit's remit is to help improve Government action to reduce social exclusion. It does this by looking in depth at particular policy areas and recommending joined up solutions to interconnected problems.

In addition the SEU is also carrying out work on Impact and Trends in social exclusion to develop a clearer understanding of how Government policies work together to tackle social exclusion for particular groups and to provide a comprehensive evidence base to inform current and future policy-making.

The SEU's projects were chosen by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister following consultation with other Ministers and suggestions from interested groups. Potential new projects are fully tested against a set of objective criteria which include assessing whether a potential new project area has a strong preventative focus; covers an issue currently falling between Government Departments, and will not duplicate work being done elsewhere.

Social Exclusion and Urban Policy Units

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many conferences staff of the *(a)* Social Exclusion Unit and *(b)* Urban Policy Unit attended in each year since the Unit was established; what the (i) cost and (ii) purpose was in each case; and how many were overseas conferences. [113551]

Yvette Cooper: In the financial year 2002–03 the Social Exclusion Unit attended 27 conferences at a total cost of £8,942.99. In the financial year 2001–02 the SEU attended 35 conferences at a total cost of £10,511.10.

Similar information for the SEU and the Urban Policy Unit for 1997–2001 is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost

All conferences attended are associated with the work of the Units.

Staff Drug Testing

Mr. Eric Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will authorise drug testing of staff within his Department. [122136]

Yvette Cooper: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister currently has no plans to introduce drug testing of staff.

Staff Relocation

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister have been relocated out of London since May 2002. [121783]

Yvette Cooper: None

Staff Working Hours

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many persons in his Department worked in excess of 48 hours per week in any of the last 52 weeks; and what percentage of staff employed this represents. [121785]

Yvette Cooper: 160 staff in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, including its Executive Agencies, worked in excess of 48 hours per week in any one of the

last 52 weeks. This figure represents 4 per cent. of staff. These figures do not include the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister staff working in the Government Offices where this information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Towns and Cities (Regeneration)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps the Government has taken to regenerate the UK's towns and cities. [124199]

Yvette Cooper: The Government's policies for delivering an urban renaissance were set out in theUrban White Paper "Our Towns and our Cities: the Future" published in November 2000. This provides the framework within which Government policies and programmes affecting urban areas in England are co-ordinated.

In February 2003, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister launched "Sustainable Communities: building for the future"—a £22 billion action programme to improve housing and communities, including over £5 billion to regenerate deprived areas. This programme builds on the policies and actions in the Urban White Paper and the Rural White Paper "Our Countryside: the future."

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has established a £2 billion Single Regeneration Budget to provide resources to support regeneration activity carried out by local regeneration partnerships. Managed at regional level by the RDAs, this programme promotes sustainable economic growth, enterprise and major regeneration projects in nine English regions (including London), with a focus on urban areas. 14 Urban Regeneration Companies have been set up to regenerate some of the most neglected areas in our towns and cities.

English Partnerships (EP) are involved in wide range of regeneration and development projects across the country. EP is focusing on identifying and delivering more brownfield land for housing and sustainable urban development. Already an initial list of 42 sites have been announced for EP to concentrate on.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is also investing over £4 billion through the Neighbourhood Renewal National Strategy Action Plan to tackle deprivation, and extend prosperity and opportunity to the poorest neighbourhoods in the country. This money is used to encourage the better targeting of services and mainstream public funds to the most deprived areas and to provide evidence of best practice through pathfinder programmes.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 16 July 2003

TREASURY

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his Answer of 10 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 745W, on asbestos, if he will list the buildings which have been identified as containing asbestos. [122988]

John Healey: All departments are aware of the new Regulation 4 of the Control of Asbestos at Work (CAW) regulations 2002 and will be fully compliant by the required date of 21 May 2004. Information on buildings identified as containing asbestos has been placed in the Library of the House

British Overseas Territories

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what responsibilities his Department undertakes in connection with British overseas territories. [123992]

John Healey: Together with FCO and Inland Revenue, HM Treasury seeks to ensure that the regulation of the financial services sector in the Caribbean overseas territories, Bermuda and Gibraltar is maintained to the highest international standards, and that these territories comply with international standards of fiscal transparency.

Environmental Taxes

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the revenue received by the Government from taxes paid by different modes of transport that are designed to have an environmental impact *(a)* as a proportion of total UK environmental tax revenue and *(b)* in relation to the contribution made to UK GDP by each transport mode. [124766]

John Healey: The Chancellor considers a range of relevant economic, social and environmental factors when deciding all taxation policy. Determining a definition of what is an environment tax is therefore difficult as: some taxes have been specifically designed to help achieve environmental goals, such as the aggregates levy, landfill tax and the climate change levy; some have been restructured to reflect environmental impacts, such as fuel duty differentials, company car tax and reforms to capital allowances to provide tax incentives for environmentally-friendly technologies; and some taxes were introduced for non-environmental reasons, but can have some environmental impact—for example, air passenger duty.

A number of these environmental taxes, such as landfill tax, climate change levy and aggregates levy, were introduced alongside offsetting tax cuts and recycling of revenue into environmental spending programmes, making them broadly revenue neutral.

This Government has also demonstrated a commitment to using alternatives to taxation to protect and improve the environment, for example tradeable permit schemes as well as regulation and spending programmes.

A modern economy could not function properly without an effective transport system. Figures are not readily available disaggregating the contribution of transport to the economy into different transport modes.

In addition, many of the outputs of transport, such as the benefits from journeys by car, are not fully captured in national measures of UK GDP. The table below sets out revenues from the main taxes with a strong environmental dimension in 2002–03.

Other environmental taxes

	£
Climate Change Levy	0.9 billion
Landfill Tax	0.7 billion
Aggregates Levy	0.3 billion
Fuel Duties	
Ultra low sulphur petrol	12.7 billion
Ultra low sulphur diesel	9.2 billion
Road gases:	8.0 million
Biodiesel	0.9 million
Vehicle excise duties	
Cars	4.2 billion
Lorries	0.28 billion
Buses	29 million
Company car tax	3.6 billion

Euro

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what steps he will be taking before December to campaign for British membership of the euro; [126682]

(2) what steps he will be taking before December to campaign for British membership of the euro; [126676]

(3) what steps he will be taking before December to campaign for British membership of the euro; [126677]

(4) what steps he will be taking before December to campaign for British membership of the euro; [126678]

(5) what steps he will be taking before December to campaign for British membership of the euro; [126679]

(6) what steps he will be taking before December to campaign for British membership of the euro; [126680]

(7) what steps he will be taking before December to campaign for British membership of the euro; [126681]

(8) what steps he will be taking before December to campaign for British membership of the euro. [126683]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on 20 June 2003,

Official Report, column 459W, which stated that Ministers will be holding a series of meetings around the country, campaigning for a pro-European consensus.

Household Debt

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the average *(a)* household debt per annum and *(b)* household monthly income in each year since 1997. [125834]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Dr. Cable dated 16 July 2003

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question on average household debt and household income. (125834)

The information requested is shown in the table below. The households' financial liabilities and households' gross disposable income series used in the calculations are national accounts series for the combined household and non-profit institutions serving households (NPISH) sectors. The accounts for the household and NPISH sectors are currently combined; separate estimates are not available.

Average household debt per annum and monthly household income for each year since 1997

£000

	Average household debt during year[1]	*Average household income per month*[2]
1997	24,500	1,950
1998	26,000	2,000
1999	28,000	2,100
2000	30,500	2,200
2001	33,500	2,350
2002	37,500	2,400

Notes:
[1] Rounded to nearest £500.
[2] Rounded to nearest £50.

Income Tax

Mr. Syms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what studies his Department is undertaking on the possible effects of an increase in income tax. [125044]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have committed themselves not to increase the basic or top rates of income tax within the lifetime of this Parliament. Policies on income tax rates and allowances are set out in the Budget and Pre-Budget reports, which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 26 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 933W, on income tax, what factors underlay his conclusion that the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. [125398]

Dawn Primarolo: The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost because nearly 2,000 pieces of information have been requested (increasing the basic rate limit to seven different levels, and for each limit, introducing 13 additional higher income tax rates for 20 annual gross income levels). The sum of these requests would require a separate analysis that would exceed the rate for reasonable cost.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to the statistics on the Inland Revenue regarding approved pension schemes, available at: http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/pensions/p_t091_htm, which of the figures are based on *(a)* administrative data and *(b)* information compiled by the Office for National Statistics. [125410]

Dawn Primarolo: The figures in the table are compiled from a number of different sources. Inland Revenue estimates of average marginal rates of income tax are used with ONS data on occupational pension contributions (net of estimated transfers, refunds and surrenders compiled from FSA and ABI data); investment income; lump sum payments; and pensions in payment. All other components of the table are Inland Revenue estimates based primarily on administrative data.

Unemployment (Wandsworth)

Tom Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effect of his policies on unemployment levels within the London borough of Wandsworth during the last 12 months. [126175]

John Healey: In Wandsworth, as in the rest of the UK, the Government's policies to deliver a sound and credible platform of economic stability and to improve labour market performance are helping to achieve our long-term goal of employment opportunity for all. As a result, the claimant count in Wandsworth is down by 44 per cent. on its 1997 level.

Recognising the importance of worklessness as a constraint on the economy, the Government have made a particular commitment to help those excluded from the labour force back into employment. The Government's new deal policies have helped almost 900 long-term unemployed aged 25 and over in Wandsworth over the last 12 months to gain new skills and experience. This, in combination with our other policies, has helped to reduce both youth and long-term claimant count unemployment in Wandsworth by over 20 per cent. in the last year and by over 60 per cent. since 1997.

TRANSPORT

Vehicle Excise Duty Evasion

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the proportion of drivers who avoid paying car tax. [126057]

Mr. Jamieson: A national roadside survey June 2002 showed that some 1.75 million vehicles were evading vehicle excise duty (VED). There are currently over 30 million registered vehicles.

The survey indicated the loss of revenue from evasion at some 4.5 per cent. of that due. This equates to £193 million in 2002–03. This loss was offset by £110 million in fines, penalties and relicensing revenue through enforcement action, brought against 820,000 offenders.

A further range of measures were announced on 22 May to modernise the vehicle registration system. These are designed to improve the accuracy of the vehicle register, help local authorities tackle abandoned vehicles, reduce VED evasion and vehicle crime generally.

Armed Aircraft Marshals

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether armed marshals are being deployed on British aircraft; and what information is being given to the captain of the aircraft. [126054]

Mr. McNulty: My right hon. Friend announced on 19 December the development of a capability to place covert armed police on UK registered aircraft, where warranted. For reasons of security, no information about this capability—for example the number of officers involved in the programme, the scale of their deployment, or the nature of their interface with aircraft crew—is made public.

Birmingham Airport

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the implications of postponing the widening of the M42 on Government proposals for a second runway at Birmingham Airport. [126401]

Mr. McNulty: The recent announcements on the roads strategy and West Midlands Multi Modal Study could not take account of any future airport expansion as no decisions have yet been made. However, we announced that between Junctions 3–7 of the M42, Active Traffic Management measures would be trialled from 2004, which would provide additional capacity at peak times on this stretch of the network, and the case for widening would be reviewed in the light of these trials.

If the Air Transport White Paper were to favour a second runway at Birmingham airport then the major surface access enhancements required to accommodate the associated growth will also need to be identified and reflected in the 10 Year Plan for Transport.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many air passengers used *(a)* UK airports and *(b)* Birmingham International Airport in (i) August and (ii) September in each year from 2000 to 2002. [126454]

Mr. McNulty: The information is as follows:

Thousands

	Birmingham	*UK*
2000		
August	820.6	18,866.5
September	835.4	18,013.2
2001		
August	867.6	19,659.5
September	827.0	17,480.9
2002		
August	882.5	20,165.0
September	858.3	18,680.0

Source:
Civil Aviation Authority

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the numbers of passengers using *(a)* UK airports and *(b)* Birmingham International Airport in (i) August and (ii) September in each year from 2003 to 2030. [126455]

Mr. McNulty: The Department's air traffic forecasts provide annual figures rather than month-by-month projections. The key forecasts for 2015 and 2030 under two scenarios are in the following table, as contained in the consultation document. The RASCO figures include the assumption that significant new capacity is provided in the south-east; SEC assumes no new capacity is provided in the south-east above that already approved through the planning system. All figures are in million passengers per annum (mppa).

mppa

	Birmingham
RASCO 2015	16–19
RASCO 2030	28–38
SEC 2015	18
SEC 2030	41

The national forecast range for 2030 is 400–601 mppa from a base in 2000 of 180 mppa.

British Overseas Territories

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what responsibilities his Department undertakes in connection with British Overseas Territories. [123993]

Mr. McNulty: While the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has general responsibility for the overseas territories, this Department takes the lead on international transport issues.

The Secretary of State is responsible for:

the general superintendence of all matters relating to merchant shipping under the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, which includes ships registered under the law of an overseas territory;

ensuring that overseas territories implement the IMO International Ship and Port Facility Security Code;

ensuring that the overseas territories implement international standards relating to aviation safety and security;

issuing permits to foreign airlines wishing to operate scheduled or programmed charter services to or from the overseas territories;

negotiations on EC legislative proposals on transport matters which will apply in Gibraltar.

My Department provides advice and assistance to the overseas territories regarding these and related issues on an ongoing basis.

European Roads Project

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the Department's involvement in the Managing Speeds of Traffic on European Roads project. [126263]

Mr. Jamieson: The MASTER project was part of the EU Fourth Framework Programme of research. It was a collaborative project part funded by the European Commission with a numberof European and UK partners. It was completed at the end of 1998. The Department provided financial support to the

Transport Research Laboratory that enabled its participation in the project and sharing experience with the other partners

London Underground

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the performance statistics are for each London Underground line for the last year, broken down by London Underground's monthly units, for *(a)* track, *(b)* signals and *(c)* trains; and what the (i) lost customer hours and (ii) excess journey times were for each monthly unit. [125768]

Mr. McNulty: This is an operational matter for London Underground, who have provided the information requested. However, it is very detailed and I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

Road Speeds

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 14 July, *Official Report*, column 27W; if he will place in the Library the assessment his Department has made of the environmental impact of increasing motorway speed limits to 80 miles per hour. [126495]

Mr. Jamieson: New Directions in Speed Management—A Review of Policy, published in March 2000 and available in the Libraries of the House, provides information on the environmental impact of increased speeds on all roads. This information was included in the internal review and helped support the Department's conclusion that the current motorway speed limit should be retained.

National Air Traffic Services Ltd.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent meetings he has had with airline companies to discuss the performance of the National Air Traffic Services. [126488]

Mr. McNulty: There have been no such meetings recently. National Air Traffic Services Ltd. is a private sector body. I would expect airlines to address themselves in the first instance to the company itself or to its regulator, the Civil Aviation Authority.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what pollutants, broken down by volume, are emitted by *(a)* an average 2003 saloon car with a petrol engine travelling with average fuel consumption, *(b)* a 10-year-old double-decker service bus, *(c)* a diesel multiple unit train and *(d)* bendy-buses. [125762]

Mr. Jamieson: The emissions of some of the key pollutants (carbon dioxide, oxides of nitrogen and particulate matter) from the vehicles in question are shown in tabular form below. The data is from the 2001 National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory.

Grammes per vehicle km	CO_2	NOx	PM_{10}
2003 urban car (petrol)	155	0.14	0.001
1993 urban bus	1003	10.93	0.528
Average DMU train	1712	22.06	0.122
Bendy bus	n/a	n/a	n/a

The car emissions are average figures for Euro III petrol vehicles operating at an urban speed. The bus emissions are average figures for Euro I vehicles also at an urban speed. It should be noted, however, that in practice many 10-year-old buses have been retrofitted with newer engines meeting tighter (ie Euro II or Euro III) emissions limits, or with pollution reducing equipment such as particulate traps. In these cases, emissions of NOx and PM_{10} would be much lower. Specific data for a bendy-bus is not currently available: much would depend on the age of the bus and the emissions standards it was required to meet at the time of purchase. The train emissions are average figures for diesel multiple unit trains used on regional networks. The majority of commuting by train is in London and the South East, where most of the trains are electric and so have zero local emissions. A full environmental comparison would need to incorporate occupancy figures but comparative data per passenger km is not available in the form requested.

Highway Maintenance (Ragwort)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contractual arrangements exist for the clearing of ragwort from highway land along the A36 (T) and the A303 (T) in the Salisbury constituency; and what the cost was in *(a)* the last financial year and *(b)* this financial year to date. [125651]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency manages the control of injurious weeds on the A36 and the A303 through its Area 2 Maintaining Agent (Atkins) and Term Maintenance Contractor (Raynesway Construction Southern). Under the terms of the arrangements, the Agent has a duty to manage the grassed and landscaped areas within Highways Agency land adjacent to the highway in compliance with the Trunk Road Maintenance Manual. In this Manual, Volume 2 Chapter 1.10 Section *(b)* 'Nuisance' states that the Highways Agency aims to take a proactive approach to the control of injurious weeds, such as ragwort, as defined in the Weeds Act 1959. Priority is given to the control of ragwort on highway land which is adjacent to or near agricultural or grazing land.

The costs shown below have been calculated by proportioning the spend on the A36 and A303 routes as a whole to the lengths encompassed by the Salisbury constituency.

The cost of clearing ragwort in the 2002–03 financial year was £19,500.

The cost for clearing ragwort this financial year is £1,750 to date.

Road Haulage Companies

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many foreign road haulage companies have been prosecuted for failure to comply with

(a) traffic and *(b)* road worthiness regulations in the UK in each of the last five years; and what the country of origin was in each case. [125541]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of prosecuted traffic and roadworthiness offences committed by foreign drivers and operators since 2000 is as follows:

2000—49

2001—33

2002—26

Nationality	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Handling agent based in UK	36	18	9
Germany	6	6	10
Republic of Ireland	0	0	2
Netherlands	4	4	5
Belgium	1	3	0
Poland	2	2	0

Data prior to 2000 is not currently available.

Road Safety Strategy

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* timetable and *(b)* scope are of the Government's review of the Road Safety Strategy; and who will be conducting the review. [126257]

Mr. Jamieson: The main objective of the review is to provide a realistic evaluation of progress on delivery of the Road Safety Strategy towards meeting the Government's 2010 casualty reduction targets. The review will therefore focus on implementation of the original strategy launched in March 2000 taking into account latest casualty trends, but will also assess new initiatives, problems or constraints that have emerged.

The review is being conducted by the Department, in consultation with the Road Safety Advisory Panel and with many of the individual partners, both within and outside Government, who play an active role in delivering the Strategy. The aim is to complete the review in spring 2004.

School Buses

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many school buses have been brought into service since 1997. [125202]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not collected.

Statutory home to school transport in England is arranged by local education authorities. They may provide passes for eligible pupils to use on scheduled bus services, or negotiate contracts for dedicated bus services with bus operators.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many new entrants to the Civil Service were employed in her Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 or over. [119828]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Cabinet Office (Mr. Alexander) on 24 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 657W.

Departmental Policies (Pendle)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what policies *(a)* initiated and *(b)* managed by her Department since 2001 have had an impact on Pendle; and if she will make a statement. [124097]

Alun Michael: Nationally, £1.6 billion of England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) funding is available to farmers from 2000 to 2006 for environmental protection and improvement, and rural development.

All ERDP schemes, except one, are available in Pendle since 2001 and are shown as follows:

Land-based schemes

Countryside Stewardship Scheme;

Energy Crops Scheme;

Farm Woodland Premium Scheme;

Hill Farm Allowance;

Organic Farming Scheme; and

Woodland Grant Scheme.

Project-Based schemes

Processing and Marketing Grant;

Rural Enterprise Scheme; and

Vocational Training Scheme.

Drinking Water

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on drinking water quality in England since 1993. [125652]

Mr. Morley: Standards of public drinking water supplies have improved year on year since the Drinking Water Inspectorate was set up in 1990. The Chief Inspector's Annual Report published on 9 July 2003 reveals that 99.87 per cent. of more than 2.9 million tests carried out in England and Wales during 2002 met all the national and EU drinking water quality standards. 10 years ago nearly 37,000 tests failed to meet these standards. Last year, that number was just 3,741. A copy of the Report is available in the House Library.

Equine Welfare

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent meetings she has held with the British Horse Society on equine welfare. [125998]

Alun Michael: I have frequent and productive discussions with the British Horse Society to discuss horse issues and we also meet in the Rural Affairs Forum for England (of which the Chief Executive of the Society is a member). Officials in the Horse Industry Team and in other parts of my Department have

frequent meetings with the Society and value their practical help and expert advice on welfare and other issues.

EU Committees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list *(a)* the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU committee on the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture, *(b)* the number of times, and the dates, on which it has met since January 2002, *(c)* the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, *(d)* the decisions it has made since January 2002 and *(e)* the means used to communicate the decisions to the House. [110301]

Mr. Bradshaw: The EU Committee on the Conservation, Characterisation, Collection and Utilisation of Genetic Resources in Agriculture does not have a fixed membership, but consists of delegates drawn from each of the 15 European member states

The Committee has met twice since January 2002, on 29 January 2002 and on 24 February 2003. The agenda items it considered at these meetings were:

Exchange of views on a Commission proposal for a new Council Regulation on the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture (29 January 2002);

Report on the state of projects funded under Council Regulation 1467/94 (29 January 2002 and 24 February 2003);

Exchange of views on a Commission working document on a revised proposal for a new Council Regulation on the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture (24 February 2003).

No decisions were taken at these meetings.

Decisions of EU Comitology Committees are not routinely deposited for scrutiny under established scrutiny procedures. Together with member states, the Commission has been conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of Comitology Committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

"simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

The Working Group on the Friends of Comitology is meeting later this month to discuss proposals for interim reform. As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the Committee. The second report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 10 January 2003 ref 5060/03, COM(03)733. As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every Comitology Committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU committee for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress of the Directive on conservation of wild birds (ORNIS), the number of times and the dates on which it has met since January 2002, the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, the decisions it has made since January 2002 and the means used to communicate these decisions to the House. [110491]

Mr. Bradshaw: The ORNIS Committee (the Committee for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress of the Directive on conservation of wild birds) does not have a fixed membership, but consists of delegates drawn from each of the 15 European member states. UK representation usually consists of one official from my Department, together with a scientific adviser from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. Officials from the devolved administrations sometimes also attend meetings.

Since January 2002 the ORNIS Committee has met twice, on 14 June 2002 and 26 June 2003. The main agenda items considered were:

Commission's Sustainable Hunting Initiative: The Commission presented its draft guidance document on interpretation of the Birds Directive. Member states were asked for comments and corrections on the draft guidance and on scientific data. The updated guidance document was made at the last meeting, pending further consideration of a key chapter.

Article 4 (Special Protection Areas): Member states provided updates on completing the Special Protection Area network and were updated by the Commission on progress regarding action plans for Annex I species.

Update on EU enlargement preparations: Update from the Commission, including agreement that accession countries could attend future meetings as observers and that future Annexes to the Directive should comprise scientific names only (given the difficulty of including common names in the increasing numbers of languages). Timeframes for implementation of the directive as well as monitoring and peer review exercise for Accession countries.

Other information points, including reporting by member states under Article 9 and 12 of the directive, seminar on management of the cormorant, information systems for NATURA 2000 and collaboration with the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA). The UK also highlighted recent work in relation to the Ruddy Duck and sought supportive action in other member states.

The ORNIS Committee is a Comitology Committee and its agendas covered normal business and ongoing work programmes. Meetings did not involve regulatory or substantive decisions, and therefore no specific arrangements were made to inform Parliament. Ministers receive regular briefing. Together with member states, the Commission has been conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of Comitology Committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". The Working Group on the Friends of Comitology is meeting later this month to discuss proposals for interim reform.

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the Committee. The second report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 10 January 2003 ref 5060/03, COM(03)733.

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Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list *(a)* the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU committee on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, *(b)* the number of times, and the dates, on which it has met since January 2002, *(c)* the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, *(d)* the decisions it has made since January 2002 and *(e)* the means used to communicate the decisions to the House. [110296]

Mr. Bradshaw: The committee on the conservation of natural resources and of wild fauna and flora does not have a fixed membership, but consists of delegates drawn from each of the 15 European member states.

Since January 2002 there have been three committee meetings, on 14 March 2002, 20 November 2002 and 10 March 2003. In this period the agenda items included:

The future participation of accession countries in the committee and related working Groups—agreed to permit access countries to the committee and groups as observers.

Green week.*

Marine issues and Marine Working Group—agreed to establish group with terms of reference to establish site selection and management criteria for sites beyond territorial waters.

A Swedish proposal on the introduction of fungi species into the Appendix I of the Bern Convention.*

Establishment of Natura 2000 network.*

Application of Article 8 and Financing of Natura 2000—establishment of working group with terms of reference to estimate overall cost of managing the Natura 2000 network.

Article 12 and Article 12 Working Group—establishment of group to consider generic species management measures and relevant definitions.

Art. 17 and 16—reporting.*

Estuaries—agreement to a definition of boundaries.

Proposed Directive on Environmental Liability and its link to Natura 2000.*

GIS: state of play concerning data submission.*

Access to information.*

Access to sensitive data—agreement to withhold data on particularly sensitive plants locations from websites/public domain.

Life Nature restoration projects and commitments for designation.*

Projects to co-finance under Life Nature (2002)—support for Commission proposals for co-funding of projects under the Life-Nature Regulation 1655/2000 agreed in 2002.

Projects to co-finance under Life Nature (2003)—support for Commission proposals for co-funding of projects under the Life-Nature Regulation 1655/2000 agreed in 2003.

Monitoring.*

Large Carnivores.*

Communication issues.*

Nature Directors' Meetings.*

Decisions taken against each item have been listed. Those items marked with a * were presented for information only.

Decisions made by the Comitology committees are not routinely deposited for scrutiny under established scrutiny procedures, unless they are politically significant.

Together with Member States, the Commission has been conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of Comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". The Working Group on the Friends of Comitology is meeting later this month to discuss proposals for interim reform.

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As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every Comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Fallen Stock

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures will be put in place for removing fallen stock from farms. [124878]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government are currently considering whether a national scheme for fallen stock is viable and will be making an announcement about this shortly.

In the meantime, the Fallen Stock helpline on 0845 8507070 can give advice to farmers on collection services in their area to enable them to dispose of their fallen stock now.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many responses to the questionnaire on the proposed National Fallen Stock Disposal Scheme were *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against; in what publications the deadline estimates of 7 and 28 May were notified; how individual farmers with more than one livestock holding were notified that they could cast a vote for each holding; how many eligible farmers and livestock holdings there are; how those not voting were classified; and on what basis the 50 per cent. threshold was set. [R] [124865]

Mr. Bradshaw: A total of 105,404 letters were sent to livestock holdings on which we had information that livestock were present from their latest census return. By 30 May we had received 36,249 responses from farmers in England to the questionnaire, of which 32,489 expressed an interest in joining the scheme, 1,833 stated that they were not interested due to cost, and 1,927 stated they would be making other arrangements. No reply was received to 69,155 letters. These numbers exclude responses where farmers said they no longer had livestock or where the letter was returned by the Post Office as gone away.

The letter made clear that the proposed scheme was on a payment per holding basis. Complete information on the number of eligible farmers (some of whom may have more than one holding) is not available. However, we have made some estimates where we have information about farmers with multiple holdings who

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only sent one reply. Where such a reply expressed an interest in joining the scheme we have adjusted the figures to show other holdings owned by the same farmer to a 'yes' response. This increases the 'yes' figure from 32,489 to 33,864.

The deadlines for responses were published in Defra News Releases, News releases issued by the NFU, adverts were placed in the farming press and a number of news items publicising the deadlines also appeared in the farming press.

The 50 per cent. threshold was set on the basis of estimates about the funds that this level of participation in a scheme would raise and which, when taken with the government contribution, would allow the scheme to operate in a way that was financially viable.

Agricultural Subsidies

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's policy is on the issue of farm subsidies within the world trade negotiations in Mexico. [124821]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government considers it vital that WTO members deliver on the Doha commitment to fundamental reform of agricultural subsidies. The EU's decision last month to reform the Common Agricultural Policy is a major step toward achieving this objective and we urge our trading partners to be prepared to respond in the most positive manner so that a successful outcome can be negotiated at the ministerial meeting in Mexico.

Hunting with Dogs

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the police over the implementation of a possible ban on hunting with dogs. [125139]

Alun Michael: During the period of consultation announced in my statement to the House of Commons on 21 March 2001 and subsequently during the preparation of the proposals set out in the Hunting Bill I discussed the issues with the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Superintendents Association and the Police Federation. I also discussed my proposals with a number of individual senior police officers. Immediately after the discussions of the House on 30 June I had a further discussion with Mr. Alistair McWhirter who is rural policy spokesman for the Association of Chief Police Officers and I spoke to him again when it became clear that his views and those of ACPO had been misrepresented in some Press and Media reports.

During the debate on 9 July, *Official Report*, column 1281, I spelt out for the House the legislative and policing implications of the amendments to the Bill in terms that had been agreed with Mr. McWhirter and the ACPO as well as the Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Ministerial Colleagues at the Home Office.

Information Technology

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what major IT projects with a value in excess of £10,000 she authorised expenditure on in each of the last three financial years. [125724]

Alun Michael: Defra was established as a new Department in June 2001. A table showing the major authorised IT projects with a total project cost exceeding £10,000 undertaken since that date, has been placed in the Library of the House. The word 'authorised' has been interpreted to mean having an approved business case. Information provided relates to the core Department only.

Landfill

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she will take to ensure that the provisions of the Landfill Directive to ban the disposal of whole tyres in landfill sites from 16 July 2003 are enforced by the Environment Agency; and if she will make a statement. [125150]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency is well aware of its regulatory and enforcement responsibilities in this and other environmental areas and will carry these out to the best of its ability.

Under the Landfill Directive, the ban on landfilling tyres comes into effect on 16 July 2003 in respect of new landfill sites or for hazardous waste landfill sites. For existing non-hazardous waste landfill sites, the ban comes into force as and when each site is permitted under landfill/pollution prevention and control legislation.

Milk

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with supermarkets on the price of milk paid to dairy farmers. [124493]

Mr. Bradshaw: The prices negotiated between retailers and processors or processors and producers are a private commercial matter. We have therefore had no discussion with the supermarkets on this point.

Power Stations

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the load factor was in each year from 1999, of each power station without flue gas desulphurisation equipment fitted; and on what date a BATNEEC application to allow the loading to exceed forty per cent. was *(a)* submitted, *(b)* agreed and *(c)* rejected in each applicable case. [123815]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 July 2003]*: Operators of large coal and oil fired power stations are regulated by the Environment Agency ("the Agency") through a system of authorisation under the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Conditions are set in authorisations to ensure environmental protection and include emission limits with which operators must comply.

In 1999 a review of the conditions contained in the authorisations was carried out by the Agency to secure further reductions in sulphur dioxide emissions, and to achieve a 50 per cent. reduction by 2005 of the 1999

emission limits. In order to achieve this reduction, the Agency introduced conditions in the authorisations to encourage the building and operation of Flue Gas Desulphurisation ("FGD") equipment. The Agency formed the view that if a power station were to operate above a load factor of 40 per cent. then it would become economically viable to fit FGD equipment. Conditions were included in the authorisations whereby operators that did not have FGD equipment fitted, were required to submit a Best Available Techniques Not Entailing Excessive Cost ('BATNEEC') justification if they wanted to continue operating after September 2001 at a load factor exceeding 40 per cent. The justifications were received in May and June 2000, as listed in the table to this answer.

The exercise coincided with the introduction of the New Electricity Trading Arrangements (or "NETA"). It was recognised that the NETA could alter the market structure of the sector, and that such change could have significant repercussions for the BATNEEC considerations. Because of this economic uncertainty, the Agency did not, at that time, formally accept or reject the BATNEEC cases.

As NETA is now established, the BATNEEC cases made in 2000 are being reviewed. This may lead to a modification of the authorisations of those plant that are operated at high load factors without FGD equipment. This exercise will form part of a wider review of the performance of the coal fired power stations and will take into account further commitments by operators to fit FGD equipment and the requirements under the revised EU Directive concerning Large Combustion Plant.

Operators are not required to report load factors so that information is not available.

Power stations that submitted 'BATNEEC' justification for operating above a 40 per cent. load factor without Flue Gas Desulphurisation abatement

Operator[1]	*Site*	*Date of justification*
AEP	Ferrybridge	June 2000
	Fiddler's Ferry	
Innogy	Aberthaw	June 2000
	Didcot	
	Tilbury	
London Power	Cottam	May 2000
PowerGen	Drakelow	May 2000
	Grain	
	High Marnham	
	Ironbridge	
	Kingsnorth	
International Power	Rugeley	May 2000

[1] Current operator, may differ to that in 2000

Source:
Environment Agency

Private Sewers

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps the Government are taking to address the maintenance problems faced by the owners of existing private sewers; [126029]

(2) whether she plans to amend section 104 of the Water Industry Act 1991 to make it compulsory for sewerage undertakers to adopt existing private sewers; [126030]

(3) what plans she has to assist owners of private sewers with maintenance costs before the implementation of new legislation; [126031]

(4) what the time-scale is for changes to the legislation on existing private sewers; [126032]

(5) if she will make it her policy to ensure that the owners of private sewers do not bear sole responsibility for paying for the maintenance of such sewers. [126033]

Mr. Morley: The Department has commissioned research into the extent and condition of private sewers in England and Wales. The problems arising from the current arrangements for existing private sewers have been examined, especially with regard to their ownership and maintenance.

A public consultation paper seeking views on possible options for addressing these problems was published on 1 July this year. The consultation period extends until 26 September 2003. We will need to review responses to the consultation before reaching a view on what action might follow.

Radioactive Waste

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress in establishing a committee on Radioactive Waste Management. [122611]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 2 July 2003]:* I have today, along with the Environment Ministers for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, appointed Katharine Bryan as Chair of the new Committee on Radioactive Waste Management, CoRWM. Her task will be to lead CoRWM in recommending how the UK should manage its most highly radioactive waste and keep it safe for many thousands of years. Together, we shall receive CoRWM's recommendations, and around 2006, we shall decide how these should be implemented to secure the best outcome for the UK as a whole.

In September 2001, we invited comments on our proposed programme, Managing Radioactive Waste Safely. As we said, a substantial legacy of solid radioactive waste is being stored, awaiting a decision on how best to manage it for many thousands of years while radioactivity falls to safe levels. Even if no new nuclear plants are built, around 500,000 tonnes of waste will arise over the next century as existing plants are shut down and cleaned up. We proposed a rigorous and public review of alternative options, including underground disposal and surface storage. We proposed a new independent body to advise us when enough information had been gathered to decide the best option or combination of options. There was general support for this approach.

We advertised for CoRWM in March 2003. We received over 400 applications. We have begun by appointing the Chair who will help us identify the best team. We shall now interview and appoint the remaining members so that CoRWM is up and running by October 2003.

CoRWM's terms of reference require it, among other things, to aim to make its recommendations no later than the end of 2005; to prepare a work programme that will enable it to do this; to send this to us for agreement at an early stage; to meet us every six months; and to make an annual progress report which we can place before Parliament. Its review of options must be carried out in an open, transparent and inclusive manner; to inspire public confidence in the way in which it works, in order to secure such confidence in its eventual recommendations; and so to ensure the long-term safety of the UK's radioactive wastes.

I am confident that Katharine will lead the Committee and the review very effectively. I shall make an announcement when the rest of CoRWM is appointed and it is ready to start work. With this important step forward in the process for deciding future policy for the long-term management of the UK's radioactive waste, Government have been giving consideration to the future of United Kingdom Nirex Ltd. (Nirex). As well as undertaking important work on standards for the conditioning and packagng of radioactive waste, the company has extensive knowledge of some of the potential options for radioative waste mangement to be considered by CoRWM.

It is very important that Nirex stands ready, along with others, to help CoRWM reach its view and inform policy decisions. It is important also that the company can do this from a position where it is, and can be seen to be, independent of industry. The Government will consult Nirex shareholders on the best way of making Nirex independent of industry and under greater Government control, and our aim is to establish and announce the appropriate way forward by autumn of this year.

Rural Enterprise Scheme

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many Rural Enterprise Scheme grants have been approved by the South West Regional Appraisal Panel of the Rural Development Service in each of the last three years; and what the average amount given was. [126150]

Alun Michael: The South West Regional Appraisal Panel of the Rural Development Service has approved 112 Rural Enterprise Scheme grants in the last three full financial years. This can be broken down by year as follows.

Financial year (April to March)	*Number of schemes approved*	*Total grant offered (£)*
2000–01	5	178,483
2001–02	47	2,656,604
2002–03	60	3,914,858
Total	112	6,749,945

The average amount of grant awarded per scheme is £60,267.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how farmers applying for assistance from the Rural Enterprise Scheme in the south-west region may obtain details of the South West Regional Appraisal Panel's deliberations and reasons for refusing an application. [126151]

Alun Michael: All unsuccessful applicants are notified in writing with the Regional Appraisal Panel's decision and reason(s) for refusal.

A summary of a project technical appraisal can be obtained by all the applicants on request in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Such a summary would not contain any information on third persons e.g. comparisons between an application under assessment and any similar application that may already have received an award.

In addition, applicants can request a summary of the key points of the Panel's consideration of the project.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the criteria are for receiving funding from the Rural Enterprise Scheme; and what budget has been allocated to the south-west region under this scheme in the next financial year. [126153]

Alun Michael: The Rural Enterprise Scheme is aimed at producing sustainable outputs which contribute to the Strategy for Sustainable Food and Farming, the wider rural economy and thriving rural communities. It operates on a selective basis by supporting good quality individual projects which will contribute to these aims, in line with regional priorities and objectives that have been agreed in consultation with local stakeholders.

The scheme is administered by Defra's Rural Development Service on a regional basis. Applications for funding are assessed against the following criteria:

the need for the project;

clearly identified objectives, milestones and targets;

the sustainability of the project (economic impact, environmental impact and social impact);

the degree to which the project will produce desirable outputs that contribute to the scheme's key policy themes and priorities;

financial viability;

need for public funds;

project management and delivery;

risk assessment and sensitivity analysis; and

how well the project fits the region's needs and priorities.

Explanations of these criteria, and the need for them to be addressed in a suitable business plan, are set out in the scheme literature.

A Regional Appraisal Panel determines which projects should be supported based upon the individual qualitative assessments and taking account of the scheme's wider objectives, the quality of other competing projects, and the funds available.

The Rural Enterprise Scheme budget allocated to the south-west region for the 2003–04 financial year is £4.045 million, with £5.965 million currently budgeted for 2004–05.

Waste Management

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what meetings she has had with representatives of the waste management industry to discuss private finance initiative for waste management contracts. [124728]

Mr. Morley: Neither the Secretary of State nor other Defra ministers have met the waste management industry specifically to discuss private finance initiative for waste management contracts. I hope to meet a number of key stakeholders on waste issues in the coming months on a range of waste issues.

Water Industry

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how long it took to plan and provide a new reservoir in the UK, on average, over the last 30 years. [125575]

Mr. Morley: Four major public water supply reservoirs have been constructed in the past 30 years: Carsington, Roadford, Rutland and Kielder. These took between 19–25 years from initial investigations until completion, with an average overall time of 21 years.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of total water leakage in England is caused by Thames Water. [125576]

Mr. Morley: In 2001–02 Thames Water accounted for around 25 per cent. of all water leakage in England and Wales. Water company leakage data is published annually by the Director General of Water Services in the 'Security of supply, leakage and the efficient use of water' reports, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. Levels of leakage for 2002–03 will be published at the end of this month.

WALES

Tourism

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many members of the public visited *(a)* Cardiff Castle and *(b)* Caerphilly Castle in 2001–02. [122813]

Mr. Touhig: Wales Tourist Board figures for the calendar years 2001 and 2002 are as follows.

Wales tourist board figures

	2001	*2002*
Cardiff Castle	169,709	202,560
Caerphilly Castle	78,653	81,758

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many new entrants to the civil service were employed in his Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 or over. [119815]

Mr. Touhig: The Wales Office is staffed entirely by people on loan or secondment from other Departments. It is thus normally the case that new entrants to the civil service will have served for a period in their home department before coming to the Wales Office.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* press officers, *(c)* civil servants, *(d)* advisers to civil servants and *(e)* permanent staff were working for the Wales Office in each year since 1996. [126473]

Mr. Hain: The Wales Office was created on 1 July 1999.

(a) Until 12 June 2003 the Secretary of State for Wales had two special advisers, since then he has had one.

(b) Since its inception the Wales Office has had a complement of three press officers (there has also been one three-month inward secondment for training purposes).

(c) and *(e)* figures are published each year in the Departmental Report, the most recent of which was published in May 2003 as Cm 5928.

(d) None.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what targets his Department has for improving energy efficiency; and how he intends to achieve these targets. [116643]

Mr. Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 9 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 580W.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement, in relation to his Department, on *(a)* the amount of energy consumed, *(b)* spending on (i) energy and (ii) energy efficiency measures, *(c)* the amount saved through energy efficiency measures and *(d)* energy policy in each of the last five years. [108864]

Mr. Touhig: The small size of the Wales Office means that it is not autonomous on energy consumption and so meaningful figures are not readily available.

The Government's policy on energy efficiency in its own estate was described in the Energy White paper "Our Energy Future—Creating a Low Carbon Economy".

Euro

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he received the Treasury documents relating to the five economic tests and the 18 background studies; what discussions he has held with ministerial colleagues on the tests since receipt of the documents; when he expects to complete his analysis of the documents; and what representations *(a)* he and *(b)* departmental officials will make to other Departments before a decision is reached on the economic tests. [115380]

Mr. Hain: The Treasury's 18 supporting studies on EMU were sent to Cabinet Ministers on 16 May 2003. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor held meetings with Cabinet Members. There was an initial discussion at Cabinet on 22 May 2003, followed by a special Cabinet meeting on 5 June 2003. The Chancellor made a statement to the House of Commons on 9 June 2003.

European Constitution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European constitution. [124860]

Mr. Hain: I have had regular discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Gwydwr House (Disabled Access)

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations his Department has received from disabled people about plans for a new access to Gwydwr House. [122995]

Mr. Touhig: None.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by his Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if he will make a statement. [126208]

Mr. Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my predecessor gave the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 43W.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the cost was to his Department of mobile phones supplied to ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123136]

Mr. Hain: The Wales Office was created in July 1999. Information is not available before April 2000. Since that date expenditure has been:

2000–01—£7,546

2001–02—£6,266

2002–03—£6,472

April–June 2003—£1,832

Official Spelling

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy that official *(a)* correspondence, *(b)* reports and *(c)* documentation from his office uses the English spelling of words where this differs from the US version. [118866]

Mr. Touhig: The Wales Office complies with the guidance issued by the Cabinet Office on the handling of ministerial and other correspondence and the use of plain written English.

Partnership Agreement

Angela Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he plans to conclude a partnership agreement with the trade unions representing the staff in his Department. [117446]

Mr. Touhig: Staff working in the Wales Office are all on secondment or loan from other Government Departments and so it would be more appropriate for any partnership agreement to be with the home departments rather than the Wales Office.

Steel Industry

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales on the future of the steel industry in Wales. [121938]

Mr. Hain: I have regular meetings with the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales and discuss a wide range of issues including the steel industry in Wales.

Latest developments for the steel industry in Wales are encouraging. For example, Corus recently announced investment into its "Living Solutions plant" at Shotton, which is expected to create up to 200 jobs.

Corus also recently announced a major three year contract with Associated British Ports (ABP) to ship finished steel coils world-wide from its Swansea and Newport operations. This comes with an investment of £800,000 from ABP for a new 37 ton capacity crane.

Additionally, Celsa recently announced that they expect to increase production output beyond that of the former Allied Steel and Wire Holdings Group plc plant in Cardiff. This will be a gradual build up from Celsa restarting production operations next month, with full roll-out of its operations at the end of this year. Celsa will employ a direct workforce of 400, with a further 200 subcontracted.

I welcome these very positive developments for an industry that has had more than its share of difficult times.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Wales Office since 29 October 2002. [126611]

Mr. Touhig: Three:

Wales Departmental Expenditure (28.02.03)

Public Sector Ombudsman Service (Wales) (11.03.03)

Public Audit (Wales) Bill (01.04.03)

PRIME MINISTER

Access to Government Information

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister whether he was consulted over the decision by the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs and Lord Chancellor and the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to issue a notice on 23 June under section 11(3) of the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration regarding a complaint under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information relating to ministerial conflicts of interests. [126448]

The Prime Minister: The work of the Ombudsman is important, and the Government are working with the Ombudsman to develop a Memorandum of Understanding on co-operation between the Ombudsman's office and Government Departments.

Information relating to internal discussion and consultation on the issue of a notice under section 11(3) of the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 is not disclosed under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Defence and Overseas Policy Committee

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to provide the number of occasions the Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee met between 9 September 2002 and 18 March 2003. [126304]

The Prime Minister: There was no meeting of the Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee during this period. However, as I told the Liaison Committee on 8 July, the reason why this was not necessary was that Iraq appeared on the agenda of Cabinet as early as March 2002. From 23 September 2002 until after the conflict, Iraq was discussed at every regular Cabinet meeting.

Additionally, during the course of the conflict, an ad hoc group of Ministers, which I chaired, met 28 times. The membership of the group was the Deputy Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Secretary of State for International Development, the Leader of the House of Commons, the Secretary of State for Defence, and the Attorney General.

Israel

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister whether he raised the continued imprisonment of Mordecai Vanunu during his meeting with his Israeli counterpart during his visit to London in July. [126305]

The Prime Minister: The priority for the visit was to discuss road map implementation and bilateral relations.

The Government have raised concerns about the conditions of Mr. Vanunu's imprisonment with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Following his latest parole hearing the Israeli authorities decided against his early release. Our embassy in Tel Aviv will continue to monitor his case.

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what matters in respect of Israeli possession of nuclear weapons he raised with his Israeli counterpart during his visit this month. [126306]

The Prime Minister: The priority for the visit was to discuss road map implementation and bilateral relations.

The Government consistently urge Israel to accede to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non nuclear weapons state, and to sign a full-scope safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), most recently during official-level talks in Tel Aviv on 5 March. Under the agreement with IAEA, Israel's nuclear facilities would be subject to regular inspection to detect and eliminate any diversion of nuclear materials for weapons production. The UK has consistently supported UN resolutions calling for the establishment of a middle east zone free of weapons of mass destruction. That zone would include Israel.

JIC Access (Director of Communications and Strategy)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Prime Minister to what level of clearance Mr. Alastair Campbell has been vetted for access to Joint Intelligence Committee material. [126089]

The Prime Minister: Alastair Campbell has been cleared in the same way as other Downing street officials, whose roles may include seeing intelligence material.

Lord Levy

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister when Lord Levy has met Bill Burns, the Assistant Secretary of State in the United States State Department, while acting as his envoy; and where each of these meetings took place. [126447]

The Prime Minister: In his capacity as the Prime Minister's envoy, Lord Levy has met Assistant Secretary of State Bill Burns, including on 19 July 2001, 10 January, 11 March and 2 July 2002. All these meetings took place in London. Both men were also present at a London meeting on Palestinian reform on 14 January 2003.

Ministerial Meetings

Joyce Quin: To ask the Prime Minister what recent meetings he has held jointly with the First Minister of the Scottish Parliament and the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales; and if he will make a statement. [126521]

The Prime Minister: I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations, it is not my practice to provide details of all such meetings, under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Flight: To ask the Prime Minister what the cost was to his Department of mobile phones supplied to Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123148]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer the Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr. Alexander) gave him on 15 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 164–65W.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Plaskitt: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list *(a)* Government expenditure on ministerial overseas visits for the financial years 1996–97 to 2002–03 and *(b)* all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing in excess of £500 between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2003, including the (i) cost, (ii) destination and (iii) purpose of each visit. [126761]

The Prime Minister: Expenditure on Ministerial overseas visits for the period requested is estimated as follows:

Expenditure on ministerial overseas visits

£ million

Year	Expenditure
1996–97	7.9
1997–98[1]	6.4
1998–99	4.9
1999–2000	4.6
2000–01	4.7
2001–02	5.6
2002–03	5.7

[1] 2 May 1997 to 31 March 1998

The figure for 2002–03 reflects payments made so far for travel undertaken in this period; a few bills have yet to be submitted to Departments for payment.

A list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003 has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The list provides details of the date, destination and purpose of all such visits and the costs of Ministers' travel and accommodation where appropriate.

Special Advisers

Geraint Davies: To ask the Prime Minister what the cost of the paybill for special advisers was in 2002–03; and how many special advisers there are in each pay band, broken down by Department. [126760]

The Prime Minister: The pay bands and pay ranges for special advisers for 2003–04 are as follows:

£

Pay band	Pay range
Scheme maximum	131,008
4	78,606 to 94,326
3 and Premium	58,693 to 91,181
2	46,116 to 60,278
1	35,635 to 47,362
0	Up to 35,634

At 14 July 2003, the number of special advisers in each pay band by Department is as follows:

Special advisers

Department	Pay band 0	1	2	3	4
No 10 [1]	—	5	6	11	2
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	—	—	[2] 2	1	—
Chief Whips' Offices (Commons and Lords)	—	1	2	—	—
Constitutional Affairs	—	—	—	—	1
Culture, Media and Sport	—	—	—	1	—
Defence [3]	—	—	2	—	—
Education and Skills	—	—	1	1	—
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	—	1	1	—	—
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	—	—	—	2	—
Health	—	—	2	1	—
Home Office	—	—	[2] 4	—	—
International Development [3]	—	1	—	—	—
Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Lords	—	[4] 1	—	—	—
Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons[5]	—	2	—	—	—
Northern Ireland Office	—	—	1	—	—
Secretary of State for Wales	—	1	—	—	—
Trade and Industry [6]	—	1	1	1	—
HM Treasury [7, 8]	—	1	1	1	1
Transport [3]	—	—	1	1	—
Work and Pensions	—	—	2	—	—
Minister without Portfolio [5]	—	2	—	—	—
Total	—	16	26	19	4

[1] Plus two special advisers who are paid beyond Pay Band 4 but within the scheme maximum.

[2] Includes one part-time adviser.

[3] Includes one special adviser under their provisional pay band whose job has not yet been evaluated.

[4] Appointed by the Lord President on a part-time basis. Also works part-time to the Home Secretary providing cover for a special adviser who is on maternity leave.
[5] Includes two special advisers under their provisional pay bands whose jobs have not yet been evaluated.
[6] Plus one adviser who is part-time and unpaid.
[7] Includes the Chief Economic Adviser to the Treasury.
[8] Plus the five members of the Council of Economic Advisers who are employed on special adviser terms (two in Band 4, two in Band 3 and one in Band 1—one is part-time).

The cost of special advisers in 2002–03 is £5.4 million[1].

[1] This figure includes salary, severance pay and an estimate of pensions costs.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what the Government's assessment is of the progress made in Afghanistan on civil service reform; what assistance his Department is giving Afghanistan in this respect; and if he will make a statement. [125677]

Hilary Benn: An effective public administration is essential to the process of reconstruction in Afghanistan. DFID has been an important source of assistance to the Afghanistan Transitional Administration (ATA) as it has sought to re-establish the basic functions of government. We are supporting capacity building within institutions, including the Ministry of Finance, Central Bank, and Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission. Other donors such as the World Bank are helping in areas such as procurement and audit. Achievements have included the introduction of a new currency, development of a national development framework, and of a payments and payroll system and implementation of measures to maximise revenue collection. But much remains to be done, and after twenty years of upheaval, there are no short-cuts to rebuilding Afghanistan's public administration. President Karzai recently issued a "Priority Reform and Restructuring" decree (executive legislation) that will allow further urgent reforms to take place in up to twenty Government Departments. These reforms will be supported by DFID and the World Bank.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how many staff of his Department were redeployed out of London and the South East in the last five years. [125360]

Hilary Benn: Under a relocation programme approximately 40 Civil Service posts from our London Headquarters were redeployed to our East Kilbride Headquarters over the period 1998–2001. Staff were not required to move with the posts.

European Constitution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what discussions she has had with *(a)* colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and *(b)* counterparts in the European Union about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European Constitution. [124781]

Hilary Benn: As part of the normal Whitehall process, I and my officials have had regular correspondence with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss all aspects of the Convention, including legislative competencies. We have also had regular contact with member and accession states to discuss issues arising in the Convention. In line with exemptions 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the normal practice of Governments to disclose details about internal discussions, or information whose disclosure would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs.

Iraq

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assistance the Department is giving to the World Food Programme's work in Basra. [125704]

Hilary Benn: Since the start of the present crisis, DFID has contributed £33 million to the World Food Programme (WFP) for its work throughout Iraq, including Basra. DFID support has been earmarked for food delivery, logistical support and the provision of a United Nations humanitarian air service. It is not allocated by region within Iraq.

Iraq's public distribution system for food aid was restarted on 1 June. WFP estimates that by the end of the June distribution cycle, rations has been provided to about 26 million Iraqis, which is 95 per cent. of the target population.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assistance the Department has given to the re-establishment of *(a)* the electrical power system, *(b)* the legal system, *(c)* a police force and *(d)* a banking system in Iraq. [125694]

Hilary Benn: DFID has provided over £7 million to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to assist in the restoration of electricity supplies in Iraq. The work undertaken has included needs assessments, repairs to generation and transmission plant, equipment for maintenance crews, equipment for a hospital and for water pumping and purification plants, and lighting for Umm Qasr port.

The Government have seconded police advisers to the Coalition Provisional Authority to contribute to the development of policing in Iraq, and advisers to the Justice Ministry to assist in prison reform and undertake a general review of the judicial system. 31,000 police officers have reported back to work, and courts and prisons have begun operating again.

The Government have not provided assistance for the banking sector. The Coalition Provisional Authority has, however, been working to help restore the banking system, and many banks are now open.

To date, DFID has committed £155 million towards humanitarian and reconstruction assistance in the current crisis. Further assistance will be considered in view of emerging needs and the outcome of social and economic needs assessments being undertaken by the World bank, the IMF and United Nations agencies.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development which NGOs have approached the Department wishing to provide assistance for *(a)* the restructuring of Iraq and *(b)* humanitarian aid in Iraq. [125697]

Hilary Benn: DFID has had regular discussions with NGOs since before the conflict in Iraq started. We have only sought proposals from NGOs for preparedness and short quick impact projects to address immediate humanitarian needs. At least 34 different NGOs have submitted proposals, and we have selected 18 projects for funding

We have not yet considered longer term NGO proposals for restructuring. Our assistance for longer term reconstruction work will be considered in view of the outcome of social and economic needs assessments being carried out by the World bank, the IMF and United Nations agencies, and a donor conference due to be held in October.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Flight: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what the cost was to his Department of mobile phones supplied to Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123140]

Hilary Benn: The cost of equipment, the call charges and line rental for mobile phones and car phones for Ministers and staff working for Ministers in the top management group in DFID are only available from 1999. The costs are as follows:

	£
1999–2000	8,249
2000–01	7,569
2001–02	7,455
2002–03	6,491

Details of mobile phone costs supplied to other officials are not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Family Planning/Reproductive Health

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what percentage of Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) funding was spent on family planning and reproductive health in the last year for which figures are available; and what the total funding in this sector was. [125658]

Hilary Benn: DFID supports country Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) as a way to strengthen the social sector, pooling its financial resources with those of other donor agencies within the Government's overall budget. PRSs aim to coordinate Government led action with broad based participation, focused on delivering agreed outcomes. They also provide the basis for long-term strategy and sustained investment. We work through sector wide approaches and direct budget support as ways of supporting countries' PRSs.

The most recent data available from our information systems shows that in the financial year 2002–03, out of a total of £96 million spent by DFID on sector wide approaches, £31 million (32 per cent.) was spent on programmes that had reproductive health services as one of their target objectives. Our data systems do not allow us to identify specific expenditure on reproductive health services in previous years but recent changes will allow us to do so in future.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has an important role to play in tracking overall resources devoted to reproductive health. We are working across the board to strengthen countries' own systems for reporting against their poverty reduction targets and progress towards the millennium development goals, including through the UN Millennium Project. This includes reporting on reproductive health gains as a factor in improving health overall.

DFID's bilateral spending on reproductive health, including on HIV/AIDS, in 2002–03 was £270 million, up from around £40 million in 1997–98.

Sustainable Development/Poverty Reduction

Syd Rapson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what impact integrated frameworks have had on *(a)* sustainable development and *(b)* poverty reduction in the developing countries in which they have been promoted. [125898]

Hilary Benn: The Integrated Framework began, in its present form, in July 2000.

The pilot ran in three countries and the process has been rolled out to a further eleven least developed countries. An evaluation of the Integrated Framework is currently taking place and a report will be presented to the WTO Ministerial Meeting in Cancun in September. The objectives of the evaluation include an assessment of the impact of the integrated framework in linking trade, development and poverty and the integration of trade into development plans and poverty reduction strategies.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Department since 29 October 2002. [126609]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development has made 17 Written Ministerial Statements since 29 October 2002.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

BBC Parliament

Jim Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to her answer of 5 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 194W, when the BBC will convert its quarter-screen service for the parliamentary channel to the full screen version envisaged in its original bid. [125207]

Estelle Morris: The BBC has no plans to offer its BBC Parliament in full-screen. I understand that it did not, as part of its bid to the Independent Television Commission for the former ITV Digital Multiplex B, make a commitment to broadcast BBC Parliament in this way.

In its application for some of the ex-ITV Digital capacity, the Corporation proposed a change in transmission mode which improved the reliability of reception for many DTT viewers but at the cost of reducing capacity overall. This left insufficient capacity to offer a full-screen BBC Parliament service. However, sufficient capacity was available for the BBC to propose, as part of Freeview, an improved version of BBC Parliament with quarter-screen pictures and accompanying context-specific text.

Community Fund (Havering)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the latest awards granted by the Community Fund to projects in the London borough of Havering. [125999]

Estelle Morris: Since April 2002, the Community Fund has awarded six grants to organisations based in the London borough of Havering, totalling £627,526.

Consultation Documents

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the consultation documents issued by her Department in each of the last four years; what the cost was of producing each of these; how many documents were issued in each consultation; and how many responses were received in each consultation. [124566]

Mr. Caborn: The Government recommend that policy development should be done in close consultation with stakeholders. Formal consultation documents are only one part of this process, which includes:

- Stakeholder meetings
- Listening events/public meetings
- Web forums
- Public surveys
- Focus groups
- Regional events
- Free-phone and freepost surveys and events
- Targeted leaflet campaigns
- Road shows and exhibitions.

It is standard practice for departments to evaluate the policy development process, including the use of consultation.

Information on Departmental consultations from 2001 to date is as follows:

Title	*Date*
National Gallery/National Portrait Gallery Review: stage one consultation	January 2001
National Heritage Memorial Fund Review: stage one consultation	April 2001
BBC Application to Launch BBC3	April 2001
Report of the Gambling Review Body	July 2001
National Museum of Science and Industry Review: stage one consultation	August 2001
Geffrye Museum/Horniman Museum/Museum of London Review: stage one consultation	August 2001
Consultation on the draft Digital Television Action Plan	October 2001
English Heritage Review: stage one consultation	October 2001
Public Lending Right. Quinquennial Performance Review: Consultation Paper	November 2001
Quinquennial Review on the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art	November 2001
National Maritime Museum Quinquennial Performance Review	November 2001
Consultation on Media Ownership Rules	November 2001
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester: Quinquennial Performance Review	December 2001
Spectrum Planning Consultation	December 2001
Council of Europe—Convention on the Protection of Audiovisual Heritage	December 2001
Review of Progress toward digital switchover	February 2002
Regent's Park Sports Facilities Consultations	March 2002
UK's Open General Export Licensing (OGEL) Limits	April 2002
Changes to Licensing Houses during All New Year's Eve	April 2002
The Draft Communications Bill	May 2002
Prize Competitions	May 2002
National Lottery Licensing and Regulation Consultation	June 2002
Review of Lottery Funding: a consultation on Lottery Distribution Policy	July 2002
Children's Play review	December 2002
Export Controls on Objects of Cultural Interest	January 2003
Review of Lottery Funding	February 2003

The remaining information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Policies (Pendle)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what policies *(a)* initiated and *(b)* managed by her Department since 2001 have had an impact on Pendle; and if she will make a statement. [124099]

Mr. Caborn: The principal funding to Pendle from policies initiated and managed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport since 2001 is listed as follows.

1. Since 2001, Pendle has received 58 awards from the National Lottery[1], with a total value of £3,501,882:

[1] Some of the funding will have been allocated under policies which were agreed prior to 2001.

2001

Distributing body	*Number of grants*	*Total amount awarded (£)*
Heritage Lottery Fund	2	53,690
Community Fund	6	724,192
Sport England	6	100,861
Arts Council of England	1	16,500
New Opportunities Fund	1	4,600
Total	16	899,843

2002

Distributing body	*Number of grants*	*Total amount awarded (£)*
Heritage Lottery Fund	1	996,000
Community Fund	2	6000
Sport England	2	7,184
Arts Council of England	1	2,800
New Opportunities Fund	1	599,350
Awards For All (England) Joint Scheme	16	57,762
Total	23	1,669,096

2003

Distributing body	*Number of grants*	*Total amount awarded (£)*
Community Fund	1	221,220
New Opportunities Fund	5	657,613
Awards For All (England) Joint Scheme	13	54,110
Total	19	932,943

2. Exchequer Funding[2]

[2] The grants from Sport England, Arts Council North West and English Heritage are to Pendle only. A large number of other grants will have had an impact on Pendle but will have been given to organisations based outside the constituency.

Body	*Number of grants*	*Amount given to Pendle January 2001–03*
Sport England	1	30,000 (£10,000 per year for 3 years to August 2004) for a Community Sport Development Office
Arts Council North West	1	£12,000 per year for 3 years—2002–03, 2003–04 and 2004–05 for an Arts Development Officer Post
English Heritage	6	2001–02—£250,941
	3	2002–03—£118,501 for various Heritage schemes

3. The Community Fund and the New Opportunities Fund are to deliver £176 million to 77 disadvantaged areas that have not had their fair share of Lottery funds. Pendle has been identified as one of the areas that will benefit under this fair share initiative, with a financial target for 2002–05 of £1,297,447.

4. Creative Partnerships is DCMS' and Arts Council England's flagship programme in the cultural education field. The aim is to give school children aged 5–18 and their teachers the opportunity to explore their creativity by working on sustained projects with creative professionals. In June 2003, Ministers announced that the Creative Partnerships would be extended to 20 new areas. East Lancashire, including Pendle, will be one of the new areas in Phase 3 of the scheme, which will begin in April 2004, with activity in schools from September 2005.

Iraq

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support her Department gives to post-war reconstruction of Iraq. [125111]

Tessa Jowell: My Department has recently taken a number of measures to assist the Iraqis to protect and conserve their Cultural heritage. Two officials from my Department have been working closely in Iraq with Ambassador Cordone, Head of Cultural Affairs at the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Their priority has been to re-establish the Culture Ministry as soon as possible and a Culture Cabinet of six Iraqis was formed in May. DCMS officials have helped prepare a budget for the Culture Ministry for 2003–04.

My Department has created a database of offers of support from UK heritage bodies and others, and will follow up on these when we have a better picture of what specifically is needed in Iraq. It is in close touch with UNESCO, which is co-ordinating international help for the cultural sector in Iraq.

Lottery Distribution

Mr. Simon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the fair share initiative in terms of its capacity to distribute National Lottery funds equitably. [126111]

Estelle Morris: I view the fair share initiative as an important tool in ensuring that those communities at greatest disadvantage do not lose out from Lottery funding. Since its launch in April 2002, 77 areas across the UK have been identified to be targeted under the initiative through three programmes operated by the Community Fund and New Opportunities Fund. Over £31 million has been distributed through the

Community Fund's grants programmes targeted at fair share areas; grants of between £200,000 and £2.2 million have been committed under the New Opportunities Fund's fair share: Transforming Your Space programme; and a £50 million fair share Trust has been set up, to be delivered by the Community Foundation Network. Now that the building-blocks of the three strands of funding are in place, I expect to see a steady increase in the flow of funding over the remaining two years of the initiative.

Olympic Bid

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment has been made of the potential impact of hosting the Olympic Games on *(a)* the development of and *(b)* investment in grass roots sport in the UK. [124621]

Tessa Jowell: My Department has assessed the legacy of the Olympic Games for the development of, and investment in Grassroots sport using historical data, visits by Ministers to previous and future Olympic Cities, the joint DCMS and Strategy Unit report (Game Plan) and the details contained in the Arup report. Details of this analysis can be found in Annex 3, Evidence 51 to the Culture Select Committee report on A London Bid Olympic Bid for 2012, published on 23 January 2003.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the environmental costs and benefits of the London bid for the 2012 Olympic Games. [123953]

Tessa Jowell: The Arup report provided an initial evaluation, for a specimen Olympic Games, of the 18 themes of the IOC bid criteria required for the Candidature File. The 18 themes covered within the bid criteria include Environmental Protection and Meteorology. It will be for the Bid Company to ensure that the Candidature File, which must be submitted to the IOC in November 2004, properly addresses the environmental costs and benefits of a London bid.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what systems will be put in place by the Government to ensure that environmental considerations are fully incorporated into the design of the London bid for the Olympic Games. [123954]

Tessa Jowell: The Bid Company for the London 2012 bid will be responsible for the delivery of a high quality and competitive bid. This includes the preparation of the key bidding documents, the Applicant Questionnaire in the first stage of bidding and the Candidature file required in the second phase of the bid process. Both stages of the Bidding procedure should demonstrate how the London bid will reflect the commitment of the Olympic Movement to sustainable development and endeavours to contribute to the protection of the natural environment. In discharging this responsibility we would expect the Bid Company to consult the relevant stakeholder interests.

As one of the key stakeholders for the bid the Government will be required to sign-off both the Applicant Questionnaire and the Candidature file prior to submission to the IOC.

Sports Funding

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much *(a)* World Class Performance, *(b)* World Class Potential and *(c)* World Class Start funding has been distributed by (i) UK Sport, (ii) Sport England, (iii) Sport Scotland, (iv) the Sports Council for Wales and (v) the Northern Ireland Sports Council in each year since 1996–97. [125218]

Mr. Caborn: The actual distributions by UK Sport on World Class Performance programme are shown in the following table:

£

	World Class Performance
1999–2000	16,489,569
2000–01	20,124,502
2001–02	22,550,608
2002–03	22,175,400

The figures for Sport England are:

£

	World Class Performance	*World Class Potential*	*World Class Start*
1997–98	12,599,203	—	—
1998–99	27,366,285	—	—
1999–2000	18,881,351	[2]1,487,219	—
2000–01	[1]16,470,071	—	—
2001–02	12,627,736	14,665,698	6,537,498
2002–03	14,048,265	16,064,180	10,172,274

[1] This figure is a combination of World Class Performance, Potential and Start as separate figures are not available.
[2] This figure is a combination of World Class Potential and Start as separate figures are not available

Support for Sport in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a devolved responsibility; questions should therefore be directed to each administration.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Area Cost Adjustment

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the impact of the Area Cost Adjustment on education funding. [125230]

Mr. Miliband: The Area Cost Adjustment provides funding top-ups for areas where it costs more to recruit and retain staff. It uses the New Earnings Survey to calculate earnings differentials between different areas in the country. A threshold is set below which all authorities are given the same area cost adjustment factor. The area cost adjustment factors are set out in the following table:

LEA	*Area Cost Adjustment*
Barking and Dagenham	1.0912
Barnet	1.1447
Barnsley	1.0000
Bath and NE Somerset	1.0279
Bedfordshire	1.0478
Bexley	1.0912
Birmingham	1.0272
Blackburn with Darwen	1.0000

LEA	Area Cost Adjustment
Blackpool	1.0000
Bolton	1.0200
Bournemouth	1.0000
Bracknell Forest	1.1384
Bradford	1.0099
Brent	1.1447
Brighton and Hove	1.0113
Bromley	1.0912
Buckinghamshire	1.0943
Bury	1.0200
Calderdale	1.0099
Cambridgeshire	1.0427
Camden	1.2624
Cheshire	1.0215
City of Bristol	1.0279
City of Derby	1.0000
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	1.0000
City of London	1.4569
City of Nottingham	1.0000
City of Peterborough	1.0427
City of Plymouth	1.0000
Cornwall	1.0000
Coventry	1.0272
Croydon	1.0912
Cumbria	1.0000
Darlington	1.0000
Derbyshire	1.0000
Devon	1.0000
Doncaster	1.0000
Dorset	1.0000
Dudley	1.0272
Durham	1.0000
Ealing	1.1447
East Riding of Yorkshire	1.0000
East Sussex	1.0113
Enfield	1.0912
Essex	1.0340
Gateshead	1.0000
Gloucestershire	1.0220
Greenwich	1.2624
Hackney	1.2624
Halton	1.0215
Hammersmith and Fulham	1.2624
Hampshire	1.0361
Haringey	1.0912
Harrow	1.1447
Hartlepool	1.0000
Havering	1.0912
Herefordshire	1.0000
Hertfordshire	1.1034
Hillingdon	1.1447
Hounslow	1.1447
Isle of Wight	1.0361
Isles of Scilly	1.5000
Islington	1.2624
Kensington and Chelsea	1.2624
Kent	1.0327
Kingston-upon-Thames	1.1447
Kirklees	1.0099
Knowsley	1.0116
Lambeth	1.2624
Lancashire	1.0000
Leeds	1.0099
Leicester City	1.0000
Leicestershire	1.0000
Lewisham	1.2624
Lincolnshire	1.0000
Liverpool	1.0116
Luton	1.0478
Manchester	1.0200
Medway	1.0252

LEA	Area Cost Adjustment
Merton	1.1447
Middlesbrough	1.0000
Milton Keynes	1.0841
Newcastle upon Tyne	1.0000
Newham	1.0912
Norfolk	1.0000
North East Lincolnshire	1.0000
North Lincolnshire	1.0000
North Somerset	1.0279
North Tyneside	1.0000
North Yorkshire	1.0000
Northamptonshire	1.0285
Northumberland	1.0000
Nottinghamshire	1.0000
Oldham	1.0200
Oxfordshire	1.0794
Poole	1.0000
Portsmouth	1.0361
Reading	1.1252
Redbridge	1.0912
Redcar and Cleveland	1.0000
Richmond upon Thames	1.1447
Rochdale	1.0200
Rotherham	1.0000
Rutland	1.0000
Salford	1.0200
Sandwell	1.0272
Sefton	1.0116
Sheffield	1.0000
Shropshire	1.0000
Slough	1.1384
Solihull	1.0272
Somerset	1.0000
South Gloucestershire	1.0279
South Tyneside	1.0000
Southampton	1.0361
Southend	1.0132
Southwark	1.2624
St Helens	1.0116
Staffordshire	1.0000
Stockport	1.0200
Stockton on Tees	1.0000
Stoke-on-Trent	1.0000
Suffolk	1.0000
Sunderland	1.0000
Surrey	1.1384
Sutton	1.1447
Swindon	1.0304
Tameside	1.0200
Telford and Wrekin	1.0000
Thurrock	1.0760
Torbay	1.0000
Tower Hamlets	1.2624
Trafford	1.0200
Wakefield	1.0099
Walsall	1.0272
Waltham Forest	1.0912
Wandsworth	1.2624
Warrington	1.0215
Warwickshire	1.0292
West Berkshire	1.1252
West Sussex	1.0477
Westminster	1.2624
Wigan	1.0200
Wiltshire	1.0304
Windsor and Maidenhead	1.1384
Wirral	1.0116
Wokingham	1.1252
Wolverhampton	1.0272
Worcestershire	1.0000
York	1.0000

Asset Management Plan Survey

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will publish the results of the 2003 Asset Management Plan Survey. [125348]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 14 July 2003]:* Allowing for late returns from some authorities, and for appraisal and analysis of the data, we plan to publish the results early in 2004.

Science Teachers

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the proposed National and Regional Centres for Excellence in Science Teaching will be required to provide in service training opportunities to enable practising teachers to develop their skills in out of classroom teaching in biology and other scientific disciplines. [125269]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Our plans, in partnership with the Wellcome Trust, to establish a national network of science learning centres are progressing well. The national centre and up to nine regional centres will provide a range of continuing professional development opportunities for teachers of primary, secondary and post-16 science teachers, technicians and other support staff in the science classroom. We anticipate that, over time, the centres will help teachers to develop their skills in out of the classroom teaching.

In addition, the Department's 'Growing Schools' initiative has worked with hundreds of schools to develop best practice in the use of the outdoor classroom for a range of curriculum subjects, including science at each key stage.

Vulnerable Children

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance is issued to *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* schools on supporting children from homeless families in priority need. [124684]

Mr. Miliband: There has been no guidance issued from the Department for Education and Skills to local education authorities or schools specifically on supporting children from homeless families in priority need. We have, however, provided guidance to all local education authorities on use of the Vulnerable Children Grant, worth £84 million, which is to be used to help a range of groups of vulnerable children, some of whom may be homeless.

We shall be setting out our future vision for children's services in the forthcoming Green Paper.

Citizenship

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the standards for citizenship are in respect of *(a)* assessment, *(b)* instruction, *(c)* pupil attainment and *(d)* academic content; and what the standards are for the other key stage four statutory subjects; [125016]

(2) if he will assess the effectiveness of teaching citizenship within existing personal, social and health education programmes [125014]

(3) if he will assess the extent to which schools *(a)* recognise the aims and purposes of citizenship as a statutory subject and *(b)* relate these to the broader aims of the school, as prescribed in the Ofsted report, National Curriculum: planning and implementation 2002–03; [125015]

(4) if he will make a statement on the progress of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills in citizenship since it became a statutory subject. [125017]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: National Curriculum subjects, including citizenship education, have clear requirements for what must be taught and the standards of attainment at the end of each key stage (see www.nc.uk.net). A range of teaching and learning methods are described in the QCA schemes of work for citizenship (see www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes). Schools can adopt a range of approaches including discrete lessons; whole school activities; and teaching through existing subjects such as Personal, Social and Health education.

Assessment and reporting arrangements are similar to other national curriculum subjects. Teachers must conduct pupil assessment at key stage 3 and report pupils progress in key stage 1 and 2 to parents. GCSE (Short Course) in Citizenship Studies has been developed to give pupils the opportunity to obtain a recognised qualification. QCA has developed guidance for schools on assessment (see www.qca.org.uk). It is a year since the introduction of citizenship as a statutory subject in secondary schools and pupils need time to develop the required knowledge, understanding and skills in the subject. The Department is committed to continuing to monitor the introduction of citizenship education, to provide schools and teachers with the additional support they may need. The Department has commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NfER) to conduct an eight year longitudinal study, to consider the impact of the subject on pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills in citizenship. It will also consider the impact on schools understanding of the aims of citizenship education and how they relate to wider school ethos and planning. The NfER longitudinal study and Ofsted section 10 inspections regime will provide effective progress reports on a range of models of delivery, including through Personal, Social and Health Education.

Class Sizes

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children aged *(a)* five, *(b)* six and *(c)* seven were in class sizes of over 30 in each year since 1996–97 to 2002–03. [125231]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The available information is shown in the following table.

Maintained Primary Schools: Key Stage 1 Classes taught by One Teacher
Position in January each year: 1997 to 2003 (provisional) England
Key Stage 1 Classes[1]

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003 [2,3,4]
Number of pupils in classes with 31 or more pupils	476,822	485,311	356,586	176,962	35,813	10,263	16,399
Percentage of pupils in classes with 31 or more pupils	29.0	29.3	21.9	11.0	23	0.6	1.1
Number of classes with 31 or more pupils	14,584	14,826	10,960	5,487	1124	325	515
Percentage of classes with 31 or more pupils	23.9	24.2	17.8	8.7	1.8	0.5	0.9

[1] Classes as taught during a single selected period in each school on the day of the census in January.
[2] Includes reception classes due to an underlying change in the data collection.
[3] Only 88 of the 515 large classes had no excepted pupils or were engaged in ordinary teaching sessions which meant they did not comply with Class Size regulations,
[4] provisional
Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average class sizes were in *(a)* primary and *(b)* middle schools in Leicestershire Local Education Authority since 1991–92. [125250]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested is shown in the table.

Maintained Primary Schools and Middle Schools: Average Size of Classes Taught by one Teacher[1]
Position in January each year: 1992 to 2003 (Provisional)

	Leicestershire LEA	
	Primary	Middle[2]
1992[3]	25.8	24.3
1993[3]	26.1	24.5
1994[3]	25.8	24.6
1995[3]	26.5	23.8
1996[3]	26.7	25.4
1997[3]	26.7	25.0
1998	26.9	25.1
1999[4]	26.7	25.7
2000[4]	26.7	26.1
2001[4]	26.3	26.6
2002[4]	25.9	25.7
2003[4,5]	26.4	25.6

[1] Classes as taught during a single selected period in each school on the day of the census in January.
[2] Middle deemed secondary schools only as there are no middle deemed primary schools in Leicestershire LEA.
[3] Before local government reorganisation, Leicestershire LEA also incorporated Leicester City, Rutland and rest of Leicestershire
[4] After local government reorganisation
[5] Provisional
Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Deprivation Indices

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the index of deprivation is in each local education authority. [125162]

Mr. Miliband: The Education Formula Spending Share has a top up to reflect significant deprivation or additional educational needs. The additional educational needs index uses the following data:

The proportion of children in families in receipt of Income Support/Jobseekers allowance

The proportion of children in families in receipt of Working Families Tax Credit and Disabled Persons Tax Credit

The proportion of children for who English is not their mother tongue (in the primary and under five calculation)

The proportion of children in low achieving ethnic groups (in the secondary calculation)

The indices for each authority are shown in the table. Authorities with a figure of 0.000 are those who are funded at the level of the additional educational needs threshold.

AEN index

	Primary	Secondary
Barking and Dagenham	0.2055	0.2119
Barnet	0.1715	0.1360
Barnsley	0.1340	0.1304
Bath and North East Somerset	0.0115	0.0130
Bedfordshire	0.0292	0.0278
Bexley	0.0632	0.0578
Birmingham	0.3209	0.3314
Blackburn	0.2847	0.2175
Blackpool	0.1579	0.1561
Bolton	0.1711	0.1330
Bournemouth	0.0894	0.0801
Bracknell Forest	0.0000	0.0000
Bradford	0.2878	0.2743
Brent	0.3458	0.3335
Brighton and Hove	0.1159	0.1207
Bromley	0.0306	0.0453
Buckinghamshire	0.0090	0.0245
Bury	0.0959	0.0951
Calderdale	0.1395	0.1358
Cambridgeshire	0.0021	0.0018
Camden	0.3977	0.3608
Cheshire	0.0201	0.0175
City of Bristol	0.1435	0.1649
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	0.2200	0.2142
City of London	0.1734	0.2428
Cornwall	0.0789	0.0762
Coventry	0.1684	0.1477
Croydon	0.1547	0.2180
Cumbria	0.0500	0.0473
Darlington	0.1135	0.1095
Derby	0.1745	0.1737
Derbyshire	0.0444	0.0426
Devon	0.0423	0.0379
Doncaster	0.1373	0.1363
Dorset	0.0089	0.0077
Dudley	0.0984	0.0997
Durham	0.1097	0.1057
Ealing	0.3075	0.2650
East Riding of Yorkshire	0.0199	0.0164
East Sussex	0.0482	0.0463
Enfield	0.2449	0.2216
Essex	0.0267	0.0254
Gateshead	0.1433	0.1379
Gloucestershire	0.0172	0.0185

	AEN index	
	Primary	*Secondary*
Greenwich	0.2746	0.3083
Hackney	0.4882	0.5169
Halton	0.1756	0.1739
Hammersmith and Fulham	0.3367	0.3507
Hampshire	0.0000	0.0000
Haringey	0.4454	0.4709
Harrow	0.1948	0.1627
Hartlepool	0.1807	0.1763
Havering	0.0350	0.0402
Herefordshire	0.0217	0.0186
Hertfordshire	0.0109	0.0132
Hillingdon	0.1322	0.0975
Hounslow	0.2782	0.2181
Isle of Wight Council	0.0948	0.0924
Isles of Scilly	0.0000	0.0000
Islington	0.4157	0.4851
Kensington and Chelsea	0.2573	0.2506
Kent	0.0492	0.0446
Kingston upon Thames	0.0586	0.0465
Kirklees	0.1729	0.1539
Knowsley	0.2586	0.2571
Lambeth	0.4249	0.4686
Lancashire	0.1012	0.0913
Leeds	0.1209	0.1203
Leicester	0.3359	0.2360
Leicestershire	0.0106	0.0030
Lewisham	0.2899	0.3634
Lincolnshire	0.0466	0.0425
Liverpool	0.2740	0.2767
Luton	0.2379	0.2610
Manchester	0.3759	0.3986
Merton	0.1376	0.1596
Middlesbrough	0.2460	0.2405
Milton Keynes	0.0769	0.0749
Newbury	0.0000	0.0000
Newcastle upon Tyne	0.2237	0.2051
Newham	0.5195	0.4982
Norfolk	0.0564	0.0519
North East Lincolnshire	0.1354	0.1321
North Lincolnshire	0.0833	0.0762
North Somerset	0.0088	0.0084
North Tyneside	0.1115	0.1067
North Yorkshire	0.0034	0.0024
Northamptonshire	0.0415	0.0449
Northumberland	0.0600	0.0573
Nottingham City	0.2975	0.3199
Nottinghamshire	0.0610	0.0670
Oldham	0.2256	0.2100
Oxfordshire	0.0064	0.0114
Peterborough	0.1828	0.1727
Plymouth	0.1229	0.1180
Poole	0.0410	0.0382
Portsmouth	0.1122	0.1061
Reading	0.1183	0.1312
Redbridge	0.2213	0.1805
Redcar and Cleveland	0.1458	0.1405
Richmond upon Thames	0.0124	0.0300
Rochdale	0.2122	0.2121
Rochester and Gillingham	0.0711	0.0650
Rotherham	0.1326	0.1341
Rutland	0.0000	0.0000
Salford	0.1801	0.1731
Sandwell	0.2476	0.2299
Sefton	0.0992	0.0971
Sheffield	0.1561	0.1679
Shropshire	0.0092	0.0062
Slough	0.2341	0.2083
Solihull	0.0342	0.0264
Somerset	0.0236	0.0226
South Gloucestershire	0.0000	0.0000
South Tyneside	0.1747	0.1708
Southampton	0.1559	0.1427
Southend	0.1187	0.1102

	AEN index	
	Primary	*Secondary*
Southwark	0.3809	0.4795
St. Helens	0.1225	0.1192
Staffordshire	0.0307	0.0303
Stockport	0.0497	0.0463
Stockton-on-Tees	0.1312	0.1266
Stoke on Trent	0.1910	0.1884
Suffolk	0.0263	0.0297
Sunderland	0.1570	0.1510
Surrey	0.0000	0.0000
Sutton	0.0387	0.0432
Swindon	0.0515	0.0425
Tameside	0.1340	0.1272
The Wrekin	0.1177	0.1130
Thurrock	0.0741	0.0649
Torbay	0.1196	0.1137
Tower Hamlets	0.6642	0.6589
Trafford	0.0807	0.0832
Wakefield	0.1050	0.1014
Walsall	0.1904	0.1711
Waltham Forest	0.2948	0.3452
Wandsworth	0.2369	0.3231
Warrington	0.0375	0.0347
Warwickshire	0.0222	0.0107
West Sussex	0.0125	0.0068
Westminster	0.4386	0.4264
Wigan	0.0806	0.0762
Wiltshire	0.0000	0.0000
Windsor and Maidenhead	0.0000	0.0000
Wirral	0.1457	0.1432
Wokingham	0.0000	0.0000
Wolverhampton	0.2093	0.2079
Worcestershire	0.0244	0.0231
York	0.0357	0.0333

Education (Leicestershire)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils there have been in Leicestershire local education authority area in each year since 1996–97. [125252]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is shown in the table for each year since 1998. Prior to this Leicestershire local education authority incorporated Leicester City, Rutland and rest of Leicestershire.

All schools: Number (headcount) of pupils by type of school—position in January each year 1998 to 2003[1]

	Leicestershire local education authority					
	Nursery	*Primary*	*Secondary*[2]	*Special*[3]	*Independent*	*All schools*
1998	50	49,740	41,797	415	5,368	97,370
1999	50	50,205	42,598	431	5,288	98,572
2000	50	50,398	43,667	432	5,168	99,715
2001	51	51,193	44,736	457	5,242	101,679
2002	50	50,785	45,431	483	5,460	102,209
2003[1]	35	50,319	46,383	504	5,549	102,790

[1] Provisional

[2] For 1998 and 1999 includes grant maintained secondary schools.

[3] Maintained special school in Leicestershire LEA.

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the *(a)* percentage and *(b)* actual cash increase in education funding for Leicestershire county council for each year since 1991–92. [125253]

Mr. Miliband: The following table shows the total education standard spending assessment (ESSA) and revenue grant plus total capital funding allocated to Leicestershire local education authority for the financial years 1997–98 to 2002–03 (the years for which data is available on a like-for-like-basis) with the year-on-year cash and percentage changes.

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Total ESSA and Revenue Grant (£ million)	207.7	221.5	239.0	263.9	288.4	310.8
Cash change (£ million)	—	13.8	17.5	24.9	24.5	22.4
Percentage change	—	7	8	10	9	8
Total Capital funding (£ million)	2.9	5.5	8.3	18.9	12.8	20.7
Cash change (£ million)	—	2.6	2.8	10.6	-6.1	7.9
Percentage change	—	90	51	128	-32	62

School Exclusions

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his Answer of 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 622W, on excluded pupils, if he will publish the responses of local education authorities to his Department's letter of October 2002. [125770]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 14 July 2003]:* The responses received were not in a form suitable for publication. However, all Local Education Authorities confirmed that they were able to achieve the target of providing full-time education for all permanently excluded pupils by September 2002.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of 16 to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training in each year since 1997 were *(a)* excluded from school and *(b)* in care, broken down by (i) gender, (ii) ethnic minority and (iii) local education authority. [124270]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 8 July 2003]:* The percentages of young people not in education, employment or training (MEET) who were excluded from school by (i) gender and (ii) ethnicity are set out in the following table.

Gender/ ethnicity	*16-year-olds*			*17-year-olds*		*18-year-olds*	
	1998	*2000*	*2002*	*1999*	*2001*	*2000*	*2002*
Male	29	24	33	26	23	20	15
Female	16	16	21	18	12	13	6
Not white	[1]—	13	27	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	6
White	22	21	27	22	18	16	11

[1] Sample size too small for a robust estimate

Source:
YCS cohorts 9 to 11

Figures are not available for young people in care or broken down by LEA as the sample sizes are too small to provide robust estimates.

Higher Education

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the higher education participation rate was in each region of England in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 2002. [113063]

Alan Johnson: The Department has recently produced participation rates for 18-year-olds entering full-time undergraduate courses through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). The data cover the years back to 1994/95. Figures for the years 1994/95, 1997/98 and 2002/03 are given in the table.

Participation by 18-year-olds in higher education by region

Percentage

Region	*Academic year*		
	1994/95	*1997/98*	*2002/03*
Greater London	17.2	20.7	23.9
South East	21.1	23.0	23.3
Eastern	19.0	21.2	22.6
North West	17.6	20.2	21.8
West Midlands	16.9	19.5	21.7
East Midlands	17.1	19.8	21.5
Merseyside	16.1	19.6	21.4
South West	19.0	21.0	21.1
North East	15.7	17.5	19.8
Yorkshire	15.7	18.9	19.7
England	18.1	20.6	22.1

Note:
Participation rates have been calculated using the 17-year-old population from the previous year to reduce the distortion caused to LEA populations by the migration of students to their place of study. Figures exclude a very small number of accepted applicants of unknown English domicile. Population figures relate to persons aged 17 at 31 August in the year prior to entry, counts taken at the following 1 January; accepted applicants are aged 18 at 30 September in the year of entry.

These figures are calculated on a different basis to the Department's standard measures of participation in higher education, the Age Participation Index (API) and the Initial Entry Rate (IER), neither of which are available at regional level.

Learning and Skills Council

Mr. Mahmood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much the National Learning and Skills Council *(a)* has spent, and *(b)* is planning to spend, on public affairs consultancy and advice on (i) promoting learning and (ii) promoting the Learning and Skills Council. [125787]

Alan Johnson: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. John Harwood, the council's chief executive, will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how much the national Learning and Skills Council *(a)* has spent and *(b)* plans to spend on

public affairs consultancy and advice on (i) promoting learning and (ii) promoting the Learning and Skills Council; and if he will make a statement. [125914]

(2) how many executive directors of the Learning and Skills Council have been dismissed; if he will list the reasons in each case; and if he will make a statement. [125916]

Alan Johnson: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. John Harwood, the council's chief executive, will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Local Education Authority Budgets

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which local education authorities did not passport 100 per cent. of their education allocation this financial year; and if he will make a statement. [123043]

Mr. Miliband: In the analysis of local education authorities' (LEAs') budget returns published by my Department on 2 May, 19 LEAs were shown as failing to pass on, or passport, the full increase in their Schools Formula Spending Share to their schools budgets. My Department has been in touch with a number of these and as a result of connected figures or decisions by LEAs to increase spending on schools.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost was to his Department of mobile phones supplied to Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123142]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information is as follows:

	Calls (£)	*Line rental/other expenditure*
1997–98	52,352.41	117,693.37
Total for 1997–98		170,045.78
1998–99	50,959.11	117,339.61
Total for 1998–99		168,298.72
1999–2000	58,478.47	160,410.62
Total for 1999–2000		218,889.09
2000–01	91,335.48	237,861.51
Total for 2000–01		329,196.99
2001–02	98,504.53	275,744.34
Total for 2001–02		374,248.87
2002–03	116,603.88	237,351.90
Total for 2002–03		353,955.78

The total cost refers to the cost of the equipment (set out above as 'other expenditure'), the call charges and the access charges (set out above as 'line rental').

The 'other' expenditure includes the purchase of new handsets, personal hands-free kit, carry cases etc., but it is not possible to provide separate totals for line rental and hardware costs.

Research Funding

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the criteria are for research departments in England to receive recurrent funding in 2003/04. [125481]

Alan Johnson: In 2003/04 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) allocated research funding according to the quality and volume of research departments that were rated 4 and above in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). HEFCE allocated a further £20 million to departments that were rated 5* in both the last 2 RAE's. A further £20 million is also available as capability funding to departments that were rated 3a or 3b in seven specific subject areas, to provide extra support so the research base can improve to match that in the more established fields.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which units of assessment are receiving capability funding from the Higher Education

Alan Johnson: There are seven Units of Assessments (UoAs) in all receiving capability funding in 2003/04. They are:

Nursing

Other Studies and Professions Allied to Medicine

Social Work

Art and Design

Communication, Cultural and Media Studies

Dance, Drama and Performing Arts

Sports-related Subjects

School Buildings

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the estimated cost is of making school buildings in England and Wales compliant with *(a)* fire safety and *(b)* health and safety regulations. [125349]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 14 July 2003]:* The information available to the department from local education authorities' education asset management plans is insufficiently detailed for estimating these costs for English schools. The department does not hold information on Welsh school buildings.

School Funding (North-East Lincolnshire)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total central government funding for schools in North East Lincolnshire was in each year since 1995. [120062]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is only available from 1997–98 onwards. Due to reorganisation in Local Government in 1997–98 and previous changes in Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) methodology, it is not possible to provide corresponding figures for previous years. The information available is contained in the following table:

North East Lincolnshire

£ million

	Real terms (2002–03 prices)		
	SSA/EFS	*Grants*	*Total*
1997–98	73.1	3.1	76.3
1998–99	77.5	1.7	79.2
1999–2000	78.8	4.1	82.8
2000–01	81.6	8.5	90.1
2001–02	82.4	11.6	94.1
2002–03	81.7	13.7	95.3
2003–04	84.2	12.8	97.0

Notes:
1. Figures reflect education SSA/EFS settlement (all sub-blocks) plus revenue grants in DfES Departmental Expenditure Limits relevant to EFS pupils aged 3–19.
2. Figures exclude EMAs and grants not allocated at LEA level for all years and the pensions transfer to EFS and LSC for 2003–04.
3. 1997–98 figures for LEAs subject to Local Government Reorganisation in that year have been estimated, pro-rata to their post LGR figure.
4. 2003–04 figures are forecasts.
5. Figures are rounded to the nearest 0.1 million. Real Terms figures are calculated using June 2003 GDP deflators.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding was made available for schools by the North East Lincolnshire council in each year since 1995. [120063]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is available only from 1999–2000 onwards. Comparable data is not available pre 1999–2000 therefore it is not possible to provide corresponding figures for previous years. The information available is contained in the following table:

North East Lincolnshire

Real terms (2002–03 prices)

	Total (£ million)
1999–2000	93.7
2000–01	93.7
2001–02	99.4
2002–03	102.0
2003–04	104.6

Notes:
1. LEA Budget Figures are provided gross of all income (whether DfES grant, grants from other sources, or other income)
2. Figures provided are from the Total Education Revenue Expenditure line of LEAs Section 52 budget statements (Table 1) as submitted by the LEA (Line 4 in 1999–2000, line 5 for 2000–01 to 2002–03 and line 3 for 2003–04. Data held as at 30 June 2003.
3. Real Terms figures are calculated using June 2003 GDP deflators

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what *(a)* government and *(b)* local government funding (i) was available in 2002–03 and (ii) is available in 2003–04 to schools in North East Lincolnshire; and how much of this funding was passed on to schools in each case. [120065]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is contained in the following table. The increase in funding for each school will depend on a number of factors covering both central and local government responsibility. These are the increase in funding given to the school's authority by central Government; the amount which the local authority decides to increase its Schools Budget by; the increase which the local authority decides to give to the Individual Schools Budget, as opposed to the items within the Schools Budget which are held centrally; and the operation of the local authority's formula which gives different increases to different schools.

North East Lincolnshire

£ million

	2002–03	*2003–04*	*2003–04*[1]
Central Government Funding	95.3	99.6	101.7
Local Government Funding	102.0	107.4	—
Amount passed on to schools	75.7	77.8	—

[1] Including pensions transfer

Notes:

Central Government figures:
1. Figures reflect education SSA/EFS settlement (all sub-blocks) plus revenue grants in DfES Departmental Expenditure Limits relevant to EFS pupils aged 3–19.
2. Figures exclude EMAs and grants not allocated at LEA level for all years and the pensions transfer to EPS and LSC for 2003–04, unless otherwise indicated.
3. 1997–98 figures for LEAs subject to Local Government Reorganisation in that year have been estimated, pro-rata to their post LGR figures.
4. 2003–04 figures are forecasts.
5. Figures are rounded to the nearest 0.1 million. Cash term figures have been used.

Local government figures:
1. LEA Budget Figures are provided gross of all income (whether DfES grant, grants from other sources, or other income).
2. Figures provided are from the Total Education Revenue Expenditure line of LEAs section 52 budget statements (Table 1), as submitted by the LEA (Line 4 in 1999–2000, Line 5 for 2000–01 to 2002–03 and Line 3 for 2003–04).
3. Figures are rounded to the nearest 0.1 million. Cash term figures have been used.
4. Figures are as reported by LEAs, data held as at 30 June 2003.

Amount passed to schools:
1. Amount passed to schools taken to be Gross ISB + devolved Standards Funds + SSG + Class Size Grant
2002–03: Line 1.1.7 Total ISB Including SSG and Standards Fund Devolved Grant Plus 1.3.3 Class Size Grant.
2003–04: Line 1.0.1 Individual Schools Budget + Line 1.0.2 School Standards Grant + Line 1.0.3
Standards Fund allocation—revenue (all gross).
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 0.1 million. Cash term figures have been used.
3. Figures are as reported by LEAs, data held as at 30 June 2003.

School Governance Degree

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make it his policy to fund the persons completing the pilot Masters degree in school governance at Greenwich university. [125847]

Alan Johnson: From the information available, it has not been possible to identify the course at Greenwich university to which the hon. Member refers.

Ofsted Reports (Staff Morale)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the impact on staff morale and teacher retention of an Ofsted report that places a school in special measures; and if he will make a statement. [125224]

Mr. Miliband: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State receives a copy of the termly monitoring report from Ofsted on every school which is in special measures. These reports describe the current progress of the school against all the issues causing concern, and

would inevitably cover staff morale and staff turnover where these are having a significant impact on progress. While some schools do experience these problems when they are first placed in special measures, there are also many examples of schools with high staff morale, associated with a strong determination to effect the much needed improvements.

Sex Education

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action he is taking to improve school-based sex education for boys. [125161]

Mr. Miliband: Our Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) Guidance, issued to schools in July 2000, makes clear that SRE needs to focus on boys as well as girls. Teachers need to plan a variety of activities and teaching methods which will engage boys.

To support teachers we have commissioned the development of practical guidance for addressing the sex and relationship education needs of boys and young men. This will be available later in the year. We have also established a Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) website which flags up information and resources that are specific to boys—www.teachernet.gov.uk/pshe.

From April 2003 we have rolled out a professional development programme for teachers of PSHE which includes a specialist module for SRE. Participating teachers will be required to demonstrate a secure knowledge and understanding of the gender roles and how that is applied to teaching. Up to 750 teachers will participate this year.

Staff Redeployment

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has for redeployment of members of his Department out of London and the south-east. [125305]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My Department has over half of its staff outside London and the south-east and we continually review where our business can best be delivered, including consideration of opportunities for relocation where the business case justifies this.

Like other Departments, we are participating in Sir Michael Lyons work on public sector relocation which is due to report to my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Deputy Prime Minister in November.

Staffing Survey

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his Answer of 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 632W, on the 2003 staffing survey, whether his Department is using the *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 2002 staffing survey data in the formulation of the 2004–05 initial teacher training targets. [125771]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 14 July 2003]*: The Department is planning to use the 2002 Staffing Survey data.

Student Performance

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information he collates on the relative performance at undergraduate level of students *(a)* with GCE A-level qualifications, *(b)* with GNVQ or equivalent vocational qualifications, *(c)* with advanced modern apprenticeships, *(d)* with overseas qualifications and *(e)* with other qualifications. [112205]

Alan Johnson: The Department is not aware of research that looks at the relative performance at undergraduate level of students with different types of entry qualifications. However, research has been conducted into the relationship between A-level attainment and undergraduate performance. Studies in this area include:

"Determinants of degree performance in UK universities: a statistical analysis of the 1993 student cohort" by Jeremy Smith and Robin Naylor; available from Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics, 63 (1) 29–60;

"School Performance and the Likelihood of getting into Bristol" by Jeff Odell in 1999; available from http://www.bris.ac.uk/wp/wp__strategy/sn99-35(s.htm);

"Who does best at university?" Higher Education Funding Council for England 2002; available from http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Learning/whodoes/. The HEFCE are continuing to refine and develop its analysis and a fuller report will be published later this year; and

"Fair Enough? Wider access to university by identifying potential to succeed," by UUK 2003, available from http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/fairenough/.

Teacher Qualifications

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether, under the Education (Specified Work and Registration) (England) Regulations 2003, people without a formal teacher qualification can be responsible for the direction and supervision of student teachers in schools. [126085]

Mr. Miliband: Paragraph 3 of Schedule 2 of The Education (Specified Work and Registration) (England) Regulations 2003 defines student teachers as those aged over 18 years who are awaiting admission to, or retaking part of, a course of initial teacher training leading to Qualified Teacher Status. Student teachers may undertake specified work in schools for a limited period of time only (for up to 2 years or a longer period if approved by the Secretary of State). They must be supervised and directed by a qualified teacher or a nominated teacher in accordance with arrangements made by the head teacher of the school. The Regulations define a nominated teacher as a person who is either an instructor with special qualifications or experience, an overseas-trained teacher, a teacher who has almost qualified but has not yet passed the skills tests, a graduate teacher, a registered teacher, or a teacher on the employment-based teacher training scheme. Higher level teaching assistants and other school support staff cannot direct or supervise student teachers.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what special *(a)* measures and

(b) funding are available for the retention and recruitment of teaching staff; and to which areas of Essex these apply. [125022]

Mr. Miliband: Essex as a whole has benefited from the full range of Government measures introduced since 1997 to improve teacher recruitment and retention. These measure include: Training Bursaries, Golden Helios, extra pay flexibilities, an enhanced Graduate Teacher Programme, assistance to purchase homes through the Starter Homes Initiative, the repayment of student loans and funding for Recruitment Managers within local education authorities. These initiatives have helped full-time equivalent teacher numbers rise across Essex from 12,580 in 1997 to 13,650 in 2002.

In addition, twenty-one Essex schools are benefiting this year from the £125,000 Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG).

School Standards

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations he has received from governing bodies about the role of governors in the Time for Standards initiative. [125426]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 14 July 2003]:* Earlier this year I met with representatives of the National Governors' Council and the National Association of Governors and Managers to discuss how best to ensure that school governing bodies are fully involved in the implementation of proposals outlined in "Time for Standards" and the National Agreement on raising standards and tackling workload.

Following these discussions, my Department has set up a regular forum with governors' representatives and the signatories to the National Agreement. The first took place on 27 June. One of the outcomes of that forum will be the development of specific materials for school governors to help them contribute to workforce reform.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Rogue Landlords

3. **Dan Norris:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps his Department is taking to ensure that tenants and the public are protected from rogue landlords. [125861]

Keith Hill: The Government published a draft Housing Bill at the end of March 2003. The Bill contains provisions that would enable local authorities to engage in the selective licensing of private sector landlords. This will help them to tackle the bad effects that irresponsible landlords and anti-social tenants can have on the wider community—particularly in areas of low housing demand where the worst problems are concentrated. Raising standards of management in these areas will benefit tenants and the public alike.

Neighbourhood Renewal

9. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on progress on neighbourhood renewal. [125867]

Yvette Cooper: Last year, the Government invested over £500 million in neighbourhood renewal programmes, including the New Deal Communities programmes, which involve local residents in major projects to regenerate low income areas, and over 240 neighbourhood warden programmes.

Electoral Pilots

10. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if will make a statement on local electoral pilots. [125868]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Challen) at column 263.

Regional Assemblies

11. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what responsibilities for transport regional assemblies will have. [125869]

Mr. Raynsford: Elected regional assemblies will be responsible for a regional transport strategy, for advising the Government on funding allocations for local transport and for Rail Passenger Partnership grants. They will also have powers to make proposals to the Highways Agency and the Strategic Rail Authority for schemes of regional importance, and they will have a right to be consulted by these bodies on proposals affecting the region.

Construction Projects

12. **Richard Younger-Ross:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on recent construction undertaken *(a)* at ports, *(b)* at airports and *(c)* on railway land under the provisions of the General Development Order. [125870]

Keith Hill: The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The General Permitted Development Order grants permitted development rights to enable generally small-scale development to take place without the need to make a planning application. The Order includes rights granted to statutory undertakers for a variety of development required for the purposes of their undertaking.

Regeneration

13. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the work of the South East of England Development Agency on regeneration; and if he will make a statement. [125871]

Yvette Cooper: A new system of Regional Development Agency (RDA) performance measurement and monitoring was set up in 1 April 2002. The annual report for SEEDA, as with all RDAs, is currently being prepared and will be submitted to the DTI and other Departments in the autumn.

Homes (Modern Construction)

14. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action his Department is taking to promote building of new homes using modern methods of construction. [125872]

Phil Hope: The office of the Deputy Prime Minister is promoting modern construction methods to get homes built more quickly, more safely, and to a higher standard through a number of measures including:

the £300 million Challenge Fund, which will produce over 8,000 homes in London and south-east England, of which 2,600 will be built using modern methods of manufacturing;

the Housing Corporation's target that, from 2004–05, at least 25 per cent. of grant-funded homes will be built using modern methods of construction; and

Millenium Communities projects, which act as exemplars of using the most efficient construction methodologies. We have asked English Partnerships to give a focus on modern methods at the Millennium Community in Milton Keynes.

The Approved Documents to the Building Regulations will give guidance on how modern methods of construction can comply with the Regulations.

London Project

15. **Harry Cohen:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his plans are to take forward his London project. [125873]

Keith Hill: The Strategy Unit's recent report analysed the issues facing London over the long-term. It did not contain policy recommendations.

The Strategy Unit is now working with a range of departments and organisations to address these issues.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to revise Circular 6/98, with particular reference to *(a)* the definition of affordable housing and *(b)* the site size thresholds which trigger affordable housing planning gains from developers; and when he plans to issue the revised good practice to local authorities on planning obligations. [126337]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published today for consultation an update of the existing guidance on planning for affordable housing. The update addresses a number of matters including how affordable housing should be defined and the size of site on which local authorities can seek affordable housing. The update will be supported by practice advice. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister also intends to issue a consultation document on planning obligations in the near future. Following the consultation, it is our intention to publish a policy document on planning obligations that will replace Circular 1/97.

Arson

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much Government funding the UK forum of Arson Investigators received in each of the last five years. [125765]

Phil Hope: The UK Forum of Arson Investigators has not received Government funding in any of the last five years.

Compulsory Purchase Orders

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many dwellings in the UK have been subject to compulsory purchase orders in each of the last five years. [126453]

Keith Hill: This information is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Consultants

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total cost of consultants used by his Department was in financial year 2002–03. [115607]

Yvette Cooper: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) came into existence following the Machinery of Government changes on 29 May 2002. The estimated cost, subject to final audit, of consultants used by the Office in the period 1 June 2002 to 31 March 2003 was £8,922,000. Consultants are used to bring in additional expertise and help across a wide range of the Office's responsibilities. A few examples of the areas of work where consultants are employed are:

(a) evaluation of Local Authority statutory service and policy planning requirements;

(b) setting up of the NRU website "renewal.net";

(c) use of arboricultural consultant Inspectors to provide advice to the Secretary of State on tree preservation order appeals;

(d) providing senior Bain Review team members and conducting the comparisons between firefighter's pay levels and those in the economy generally;

(e) using expertise within local authorities and suppliers to local authorities to advise on local E-Government.

(f) seeking innovative ways of delivering services on the Strategic Partnering Taskforce.

(g) use of independent Advisory Panel members to advise on Beacon Council selection.

Correspondence

Gregory Barker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much correspondence was received by *(a)* Ministers in his Department and *(b)* chief executives of agencies from hon. Members in 2002; what the target times for replies were; and how many replies were sent within target times. [120871]

Yvette Cooper: I refer the hon. Member to the written ministerial statement given by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley South (Mr. Alexander) on 15 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 21WS.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of regional variations in staff turnover in his Department. [112751]

Yvette Cooper: With the exception of The Rent Service, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is yet to undertake such assessments.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister collects data relating to staff turnover in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and its agencies for manpower planning. The Regional Co-ordination Unit, as the corporate centre of the Government Office Network, collects data for the Government Offices. These data will be used to make assessments of regional differences in developing our pay and workforce strategy.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures he is planning to improve the energy efficiency standards of new build to achieve the 10 MtC emissions reduction per annum by 2010 as indicated in the Energy White Paper. [124639]

Phil Hope: The Energy White Paper announced that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister would start work immediately on the next major revision of the building regulations with the aim of bringing it into effect in 2005, and that we would raise boiler standards to the level of the most efficient types, A and B condensing ones. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister also indicated our intention of raising standards over the coming decade learning lessons from the standards set in comparable European countries. The revision work will, for instance, examine what improvements can be made to the winter and summer performance standards for building fabric and heating, cooling and lighting systems, while ensuring the Regulations remain technically sound, proportionate, cost-effective and sufficiently flexible for designers.

Fire

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many fires in homes have occurred in each year since 1997. [125766]

Phil Hope: The information requested is tabled as follows.

Fires in dwellings, United Kingdom, 1997–2001

	Total
1997	72,492
1998	71,077
1999	72,228
2000	70,899
2001	69,014

Dwellings include caravans, houseboats and other non-building structures used solely as a permanent dwelling.
Data for 2001 are provisional; 2001 is the most recent year for which data are available.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) of 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 33, whether there will be a reduction in the response to 999 calls in England as a result of modernisation of the Fire Service; and what definition he will use of reduction in the response. [125730]

Mr. Raynsford: Under integrated risk management, it will be for fire authorities, not the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, to set local standards for responding to fires and other emergencies in the light of a full assessment of the risks faced by their communities. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister believes that by developing local standards based on the risks faced by communities and by placing greater emphasis on preventative action to stop fires and other emergencies from occurring in the first place, public safety will be improved and lives will be saved.

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what changes to career prospects in the fire service, in terms of *(a)* opportunities, *(b)* training and *(c)* promotion he estimates will arise from the changes proposed in the Fire and Rescue Service White Paper. [125902]

Mr. Raynsford: The changes to the appointment and promotion regulations announced in the White Paper will mean that people with the right potential and skills, both within and outside the fire and rescue service, can apply for jobs at all levels and in all parts of the service. This will provide wider and more varied opportunities for staff in all sections of the service. The White Paper also announced the introduction of the Integrated Personal Development System which will ensure staff are developed and receive training relevant to their personal needs. In many cases this will include development to help them obtain promotion. This coupled with the removal of the requirement to have served for a specific number of years before obtaining promotion will improve promotion prospects of many staff.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many hoax calls were made to the Fire Service in England and Wales in each year since 1997. [126321]

Phil Hope: The number of malicious false calls are tabled:

Year	*Number of calls*
1997	88,813
1998	74,200
1999	70,446
2000	63,482
2001	63,359 (provisional)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many retained firefighters have been recruited in each year since 1997. [125767]

Phil Hope: The available information collected on a financial year basis from brigades in England and Wales is set out as follows:

Number of applicants who were successful in their applications for employment as retained firefighters in brigades in England and Wales

1998–99	1,486
1999–2000	1,406
2000–01	1,352
2001–02	1,508

Source:
Annual returns to Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Fires

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many malicious car fires were started by individuals under the age of 18 in each year since 1997. [125205]

Phil Hope: The information requested is in the following table. 2001 is the most recent year for which data are available.

Malicious primary car fires started by persons under 18, UK, 1997–2001

	Number
1997	9,098
1998	10,030
1999	14,352
2000	15,437
2001	18,841

Notes:
1. Figures for 2001 are provisional.
2. Primary fires are those which cause damage to property or involve casualties.

Homelessness

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what *(a)* the avarage waiting time and *(b)* the longest waiting time for homeless families in priority need before being placed in permanent accommodation was in the last year for which figures are available; and what the range of waiting times was in each local authority. [124680]

Keith Hill: Under the homelessness legislation (Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002), local housing authorities have a duty to secure accommodation for applicants who are eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and who fall within a priority need group (the main homelessness duty). The duty applies until a settled housing solution becomes available (for example, an allocation of housing made under Part 6 of the 1996 Act as amended by the 2002 Act) or some other circumstance brings the duty to an end (for example, the applicant voluntarily quits temporary accommodation secured for him or here by the authority). Data supplied by local authorities in England shows that, overall, in 2002/03 almost three-quarters of households owed the main homelessness duty and provided with temporary accommodation received an offer of some form of settled accommodation; for the remainder, the duty was brought to an end as a result of some other circumstance.

Information on the length of time that households which were owed the main homelessness duty have stayed in temporary accommodation (including any period pending a decision on their application) before the homelessness duty is brought to an end is collected in six-monthly time bands ("under six months", "six months to one year", etc to "two years or more"). It is therefore not possible to provide an average waiting time. However, it is estimated that just over half of the households who were owed a main homelessness duty, placed in temporary accommodation and subsequently received an offer of settled accommodation during 2002/03 (either an offer made under Part 6 of the 1996 Act or some other form of offer) had waited less than six months before receiving the offer. By comparison, only 10 per cent. had been in temporary accommodation for more than two years before receiving such an offer.

Only two-thirds of local authorities were able to provide a comprehensive analysis of time spent in temporary accommodation and, due to concerns about the data quality, comparisons between authorities are not advisable. Available information suggests that, in around a quarter of local authorities, 90 per cent. of the households offered accommodation received the offer within six months.

Housing (Wandsworth)

Tom Cox: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many dwellings have been completed in the London Borough of Wandsworth in each of the last three years that were *(a)* for private residential use and *(b)* for local authority use. [125502]

Keith Hill: Tom Cox: Details of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and private completions are listed below. From the information available, there have been no local authority dwelling completions for the last three years.

	Private	*RSL*
2000–01	209	90
2001–02	336	51
2002–03	637	[1]41

Sources:
P2 Return from local authorities to ODPM (data based on building control inspection
RSL Figures: Housing Investment Programme Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix

Housing Revenue Account

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 3 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 461W, on housing revenue account, whether housing revenue account money may be used to fund the administration of anti-social behaviour orders served on people who do not live in local authority housing. [124939]

Keith Hill: No.

National Tenancy Deposit Scheme

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his written ministerial statement of 16 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 3WS, what assessment he made of the option using the interest generated on tenancy deposits held on a single custodial deposit scheme to cover the costs of independent adjudication where disputes occur. [126046]

Keith Hill: The consultation paper "Tenancy Money: probity and protection" provided an assessment in paragraph 35 of the Regulatory Impact Assessment at Annex 1. It noted that if £790 million, the amount estimated to be currently held in deposits, were held in a single custodial deposit scheme for a year, it would raise £31.6 million in interest (calculated at the Bank of England's then current base-rate). This is income that currently accrues to the landlord or, if so specified in the tenancy agreement, the tenant.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the number of disputed cases that would ultimately require adjudication under a national tenancy deposit scheme. [126043]

Keith Hill: There is a statistical analysis in paragraphs 8–14 of the Regulatory Impact Assessment at Annex 1 of the consultation paper on Tenancy Money. This noted that according to the Survey of English Housing (SEH) some 20 per cent. of tenants said that their deposits had been unreasonably withheld in the last three years. However for the purposes of calculating the maximum number of disputed cases an SEH figure was used that showed that of the 905,000 tenancies that finished in 2001–02 some 127,000 of these (14 per cent.) involved, in the tenant's view, an unjustified retention of all or part of the deposit.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place copies of the public responses to Tenancy Money: probity and protection in the Library. [126041]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will do so when detailed proposals that will take account of Law Commission proposals for tenure reform are published. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister hopes this will be later this year.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his written ministerial statement of 16 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 3WS, which paragraph in Tenancy Money: probity and protection indicated that there is not a robust case for legislating to compel the protection of tenancy monies in third party schemes. [126042]

Keith Hill: Chapter 3, paragraph 35, of the consultation paper stated that an independent evaluation of the pilot by York University was inconclusive as to the need for legislation, as the pilot had provided insufficient evidence to assess fully the nature and extent of the problem. A more detailed report published alongside (but summarised in Annex 9 of) the consultation paper concluded that there is no clear evidence that the actual incidence of tenants losing their deposits is so high as to require legislative intervention. In Annex 1 of the consultation paper the balance of costs and benefits, as estimated for the Regulatory Impact Assessment, were shown to be roughly equal.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his written ministerial statement of 16 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 3WS, what estimated percentage of disputed cases going to adjudication he used to calculate that the annual adjudication costs of a national tenancy deposit scheme would be £19 million. [126044]

Keith Hill: There is a statistical analysis in paragraphs 8–14 and 29 of the Regulatory Impact Assessment at Annex 1 of the consultation paper on Tenancy Money. This was based on the figures in the Survey of English Housing that of the 905,000 tenancies that finished each year approximately 127,000 tenants (or 14 per cent. of that total) felt that none or a lesser sum of the deposit should have been withheld. It further assumed, having regard to evidence from the pilot tenancy deposit scheme, that the average cost of adjudications would be £150.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate the annual adjudication costs of the custodial option for a national tenancy deposit scheme if only 2.5 per cent. of disputed cases require adjudication. [126045]

Keith Hill: There is a tentative statistical analysis in the Regulatory Impact Assessment at Annex 1 of the consultation paper on Tenancy Money. It suggested that the maximum number of tenants who might feel they had a case to go to adjudication was 127,000. Assuming that (i) only a custodial option was in place (ii) only 2.5 per cent of 127,000 (3,175) sought adjudication and (iii) the average cost of adjudication under the pilot of £150 applied—the cost would be £476,250. Although the figure of 2.5 per cent. is closer to the proportion of tenancies in the pilot that resulted in adjudication a mandatory requirement for safeguarding tenancy monies would probably result in a much higher proportion requiring adjudication.

Housing (North-East Lincolnshire)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much was allowed to north east Lincolnshire for housing in the SSA for each year from 1995; and how much was spent on it by the local authority. [126419]

Mr. Raynsford: The majority of resources for housing are provided through the Housing Revenue Account. Formula Spending Shares (formerly Standard Spending Assessments) cover rent officer functions and certain homelessness and housing renewal functions, though we do not make allocations for specific services.

North East Lincolnshire's expenditure on these non-HRA housing services from 1996–97 to 2001–02 was £443,000; £785,000, £795,000, £850,000, £743,000 and £836,000 respectively.

Correspondence

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on how many occasions since May 2002 Ministers in his Department have passed *(a)* hon. Members' letters and *(b)* hon. Members' questions to agencies for response; and what percentage of the total number of letters and questions received this represents. [121821]

Yvette Cooper: Between the period of 29 May 2002 to 27 June 2003, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister received *(a)* 10,060 letters from hon. Members of which 89 were transferred to executive agencies for response; and *(b)* 3,692 parliamentary questions of which 11 were transferred to executive agencies. In both cases this represents less than 1 per cent. of all correspondence and parliamentary questions received.

Small Retailers (Deprived Areas)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on programmes under the Small Retailers in Deprived Areas initiative funded by the Government Office for the North West. [124387]

Yvette Cooper: Government Office for the North West was allocated £2,355,088 of funding for small retail businesses in deprived areas for the three years,

2001–04. It was used on a range of interventions to individual shops or groups of shops, such as better locks and toughened glass or by making improvements to their immediate environment, such as better lighting.

It is expected that a minimum of 955 shops in the North West will benefit from this year's allocation.

Social Housing

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 20 March, *Official Report*, column 937W, on social housing grant, what estimate he has made of the number of social housing schemes which will not proceed as a result of the abolition of Local Authority Social Housing Grant; and how many social housing units will be lost in consequence. [125727]

Keith Hill: On 17 June, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister announced a further extension of transitional arrangements for with debt local authorities. The period for submission of bids to the Housing Corporation by those authorities has been extended to 31 July and further resources have been made available of £30 million in 2004–05 and £40 million in 2005–06. The number of affordable houses to be built in 2003–04 from the funding for transitional arrangements will not be known until after that date.

Sport

Mr. Reed: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what *(a)* assessment he has made of and *(b)* research he has commissioned into the potential impact of sport on regeneration; and if he will make a statement. [125260]

Yvette Cooper: The potential impact of sports facilities in contributing to regeneration is recognised in the Urban White Paper "Our Towns and our Cities: the Future" published in November 2000. It covers the role of cultural, leisure and sporting activities in promoting social and economic well-being in towns and cities.

The impact of such activities on regeneration has been demonstrated by assessments carried out to select Beacon Councils for the "Regenerating through Culture, Sport and Tourism" theme in Round Two of the Beacon Council Scheme. Councils awarded Beacon Status have worked with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) to share their best practice with councils all over the country.

Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, revised in July 2002, recognises that high quality and well managed and maintained open spaces, sport and recreation facilities can support an urban renaissance and improve peoples' sense of well being in the place they live. "Assessing Needs and Opportunities: A Companion Guide to PPG 17" advises on how local assessments of need and audits of provision for such facilities can be carried out.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has not carried out research specifically into the impact of sporting activities on regeneration. Within Government, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) takes the lead on sports policy. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is, however, working closely with other Government Departments (including DCMS), the Regional Development Agencies and the Core Cities Group of local authorities to consider ways of increasing the competitiveness and prosperity of major regional cities. This has included looking at the role that large-scale sporting and cultural investments can play in creating successful cities.

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), sponsored by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, is working closely with Sport England to improve the design quality of new sports buildings and spaces by adopting best practice. Their joint report "Better Places for Sport," published in May 2003, acknowledges the role of high quality sports facilities in helping to revitalise deprived neighbourhoods.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has also been involved along with other stakeholders, such as DCMS, in analysing the consultants report commissioned to assess the costs and benefits of bidding for and hosting the Olympic Games in London in 2012. This examined the potential regeneration benefits offered by the Games for regenerating the Lower Lea Valley and other proposed sites.

Local Government Finance

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much the average Standard Spending Assessment was per head of population in *(a)* England, *(b)* the South West, *(c)* Dorset and *(d)* Poole in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [126442]

Mr. Raynsford: Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs) were replaced by Formula Spending Shares (FSSs) in 2003–04. These are not directly comparable since the total amount of FSS was much larger than the total for SSA would have been as a result of increasing the Resource Equalisation.

The population data used for 2003–04 (the mid-2001 population estimates) was based on the 2001 Census; the population data for the other years was based on the 1991 Census. These data are therefore also not directly comparable.

The following table provides SSA per head for the period 1997–98 and FSS per head for 2003–04 as requested.

	England	*South West*	*Dorset*	*Poole*
1997–98	829.45	736.59	560.95	653.65
1998–99	869.19	768.63	585.49	681.09
1999–2000	907.66	803.66	615.17	711.94
2000–01	943.33	836.69	645.79	735.73
2001–02	980.69	866.93	670.32	764.00
2002–03	995.30	876.47	665.64	759.72
2003–04	1,177.45	1,045.84	778.36	903.15

The figures are not comparable year-on-year as the services funded through SSA and FSS have changed over this period.

The figures for England and the South West also include police services. Police services are provided by Dorset police in the Dorset and Poole area and are not therefore included in the Dorset and Poole figures.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many planning applications have been made to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department. [124806]

Keith Hill: Since 29 May 2002, when the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was established, there have been no planning applications for prior approval to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fair Trade

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what EU policy is on removing *(a)* tariff and *(b)* non-tariff barriers to trade between the EU and the developing world. [125745]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The EU is committed to improvements in market access for all members of the WTO, with a particular emphasis on developing country priorities. In agriculture the EU has already proposed average reductions in tariffs of 36 per cent. In non agricultural goods, the EU has proposed that all tariffs should be reduced to a maximum of 15 per cent. The EU is also committed to the reduction and whenever possible elimination of non-tariff barriers ensuring that these do not replace tariffs as an obstacle to trade.

In addition, to assist the integration of developing countries into the world trading system, the EU's preferential access schemes allow many products from developing countries to enter the EU either duty free or with low tariffs. Under the Everything But Arms initiative, least developed countries have duty and quota-free access to the EU. African, Caribbean and Pacific countries also have preferential access to the EU market under the Cotonou Agreement under which most of their exports enter the EU duty free. Other developing countries enjoy preferential access under the generalised system of preferences.

Administration/Receivership Services

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans she has to review *(a)* the way that companies are charged for administration and receivership services and *(b)* the ways in which assets of companies placed into administration or receivership are sold. [125197]

(2) What procedures are in place to control administration and receivership costs. [125198]

It is a matter for the judgment of the administrator or receiver, usually with the benefit of professional advice, as to the most appropriate method of disposing of the company's assets, with a view to achieving the best price for them. We have no plans to review this or the basis on which an administrator's or receiver's remuneration is fixed.

Mr. Sutcliffe: An administrator is appointed by the court and is required to submit his proposals for achieving the purposes of the administration to the company's creditors and members. His remuneration is fixed by reference either to the value of the property with which he has to deal or the time properly given by him and his staff in attending to matters arising in the administration, and it is for the creditors' committee to determine it. If there is no committee or it does not make the required determination, the remuneration can be fixed by resolution of a meeting of the company's creditors. If not fixed in either of these ways, the administrator must apply to the court to fix his remuneration.

The costs of an administrative receiver, including his remuneration, are primarily a matter for agreement between the receiver and the secured creditor by whom he is appointed, but any liquidator appointed in relation to the company has the power to ask the court to fix the receiver's remuneration if he considers that necessary or appropriate.

Fuel Poverty

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Government will take to ensure that every home has access to affordable heating. [125582]

Mr. Timms: The Government published its Strategy for dealing with fuel poverty in November 2001, and its first annual progress report in March 2003. These documents set out how the Government intends to ensure that fuel poverty is ended among the vulnerable by 2010 and among the non-vulnerable in England by November 2016, as far as reasonably practicable. This will be done through:

programmes to improve the home energy efficiency of fuel poor households;

continuing action to maintain the downward pressure on fuel bills, ensuring fair treatment for the less well off, and supporting the development of energy industry initiatives to combat fuel poverty;

continuing action to tackle poverty, low incomes and social exclusion.

We are working closely with the independent Fuel Poverty Advisory Group, to develop better identification and targeting mechanisms to improve local delivery of measures to combat fuel poverty. Extension of the gas network can help to meet these targets, and my Department is continuing to consider how this may be achieved.

BAE Systems

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the management of BAe Systems concerning a possible takeover bid by a foreign company. [125588]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has regular meetings with the management of BAe Systems at which a wide range of issues are discussed, including the company's performance, competitiveness, future programmes and future strategy. Such discussions are commercially confidential, under Exemption 13—Third Party's Commercial Confidences of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Biotechnology

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her Answer of 26 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 922W, on biotechnology, how much her Department spent in *(a)* sponsorships, *(b)* grants and *(c)* other financial assistance to biotechnology companies in 2001–02. [125384]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2003]:* For the most recent financial year (2001/02), the Department's expenditure on grants and other financial assistance for the biotechnology industry sector in the UK was approximately £16 million (excluding Research Councils' funding).

Information on the expenditure by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and the Medical Research Council (MRC) was provided in my answer to the hon. Member on 26 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 921–22W.

It is not possible to give precise information, due to the lack of a generally accepted definition of biotechnology and the differences in the ways individual Research Councils analyse their annual expenditure.

Broadband

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what sums have been paid to *(a)* NTL and *(b)* BT to assist in the rollout of broadband services; when such payments were made; and if she will make a statement. [117716]

Mr. Timms *[pursuant to the answer, 18 June 2003, Official Report, c. 324W]:* In that answer I stated that "Under the Cornwall ActNow project, assisted by EC Objective 1 funding, BT received £237,225 from DTI between December 2001 and August 2002, as a result of a tender process to upgrade exchanges for broadband in a region where such investment would also not be commercially viable". I should now like to clarify the position.

The source of the capital funding for ActNow was EU Objective 1 funding. In addition, some revenue funding was provided via EU Objective 1, other public contributors and the South West of England Regional Development Agency from funds provided by Central Government. None of this funding was paid direct to BT. The applicant for both the capital and revenue funding for ActNow was Cornwall Enterprise, a part of Cornwall county council, on behalf of all public partners in the project. BT was one of a number of partners with a role in fulfilling the project. Cornwall Enterprise also took responsibility for monitoring BT's performance.

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she intends to publish the recent report by Analysis on the UK's progress on the take-up of broadband across the G7 countries. [126020]

Mr. Timms: The take-up of broadband, which is measured as an index of residential (M.J.A.) broadband penetration across a range of G7 countries, will be published in an extract from the recent report by Analysis on the Department's website in the section headed Broadband progress-national facts and figures by the end of the July.

Coal Industry

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of when coal will disappear as a plausible energy source owing to emission constraints. [125585]

Mr. Timms: Published supporting analysis to the Energy White Paper published in February 2003 suggests that coal could still represent more than 10 per cent. of total UK energy use in 2010, while falling to somewhat below 10 per cent. by 2020. The fall partly reflects the impact of an increase in the age structure of existing coal plants on plant economics, but also incorporates the impact of certain policies such as the Climate Change Programme, Large Combustion Plant Directive and the National Emissions Ceilings Directive.

The White Paper itself recognizes that the pressures on coal from an environmental direction may increase in future, but comments on the potential for coal to remain as a major fuel source if combined with clean coal technology or capture and storage techniques.

Company Directors

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 569W, on company directors, how many adverse reports in each year were referred by her Department for court action; how many directors were reported on more than one occasion; and how many of these directors were disqualified, and for what period. [125931]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Details of the disqualification actions issued and of the disqualifications obtained are published in the Insolvency Service Agency Annual Report and Accounts. The remaining information cannot be provided except at disproportionate costs.

Correspondence

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Totnes of 19 May concerning the Early Day Motion calling for a ban on trade in cat and dog fur and which was transferred from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for reply. [126155]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The reply will be sent to the hon. Member for Totnes on 17 July 2003.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many meetings have been held between her Department and the Treasury since the publication of the Energy White Paper in February to discuss fiscal instruments to improve energy efficiency. [123975]

Mr. Timms: The Treasury and Defra lead on the question of fiscal instruments and energy efficiency policy respectively. The DTI has not specifically held meetings with the Treasury on the subject of fiscal instruments for energy efficiency. However on a number of occasions discussions between DTI, Defra and the Treasury on the follow up to the Energy White Paper,

through the Sustainable Energy Policy Network and otherwise, have addressed the use of fiscal instruments in various aspects of energy policy.

Energy Imports

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the UK's energy she estimates will be imported in 2023. [125579]

Mr. Timms: As mentioned at Section 6.13 of the Energy White Paper, published in February 2003, we are likely to be importing around three quarters of our primary energy needs by 2020.

European Union Contracts

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with her counterparts in the EU concerning reform of the system for advertising EU public sector contracts for which small businesses might bid. [125168]

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend the then Minister for Competition, Consumers and Markets met her counterparts in the EU to discuss the need to reform the present system for awarding EU public sector contracts. These exchanges have taken place as part of the discussions held with the European Commission and other member states on the proposals to update, clarify and simplify the existing public procurement directives.

European Union Directives

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate her Department has made of the additional cost to businesses arising from the need, under the Government's implementation of the Equal Treatment at Work Directive, to compensate employees taking early retirement who might have worked on until they were 70; and if she will make a statement. [125296]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Early retirement packages are a matter for negotiation between employer and employee. The Government are consulting on proposals to prohibit age discrimination under the EU Employment Directive. The proposals include options relating to retirement age, but would not require changes to the age at which pensions may be payable. They do not, therefore, require additional costs to businesses in relation to early retirement.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate her Department has made of the expected quantity of age discrimination claims against employers from employees per year as a result of EU Directives in terms of *(a)* volume and *(b)* value; and if she will make a statement. [125297]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Regulatory Impact Assessment that accompanies the "Equality and Diversity: Age Matters" consultation document has used existing discrimination cases as a pointer to estimate the number and cost of age discrimination claims that might arise.

We would expect about 8,000 Employment Tribunal applications to be made per year, at an average cost to an employer of between £2,000 and £4,000 per case. To reduce the potential burden on employers, the Government are aiming to have the Regulations outlawing age discrimination in place by the end of 2004 so that employers have ample time to change their internal systems to reduce the likelihood of claims being made against them when the legislation comes into force on 1 October 2006.

Executive Remuneration

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the publications produced by her Department in each year since 1997 which have made reference to executive remuneration. [126077]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has produced consultative documents specifically on the issue of executive remuneration on three occasions since 1997, as follows:

		Date
99/923	Directors' Remuneration	July 1999
01/1400	Directors' Remuneration	December 2001
03/652	"Rewards for Failure" Directors' Remuneration—Contracts, Performance and Severance	June 2003

Other publications will also have made reference to executive remuneration but a more detailed answer could be obtained only at disproportionate cost as such information is not held centrally.

Independent Insurance Company

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reports she has received from the administrators concerning the conduct of the directors of Independent Insurance Company; and what action she intends to take concerning the company's collapse. [126073]

Mr. Sutcliffe: On 17 June 2001, the High Court of Justice appointed provisional liquidators of Independent Insurance Company Ltd. The provisional liquidators are responsible for the protection of the company estate until the court determines the winding up petition presented against the company. There is no requirement to submit conduct reports on the company directors, until such time as a winding up order is made by the court, at which time the business affairs and failure of the company would be investigated by the Official Receiver.

Insolvency Service

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many licensed insolvency practitioners are employed by the Insolvency Service. [125833]

Mr. Sutcliffe: None.

Internal Dispute Resolution Procedures

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employees are estimated by her Department to lack adequate internal dispute resolution procedures; what proportion of these are small and medium-sized enterprises; how many are

expected to lack adequate procedures when the new rules come into force in 2004; and if she will make a statement. [125822]

Mr. Sutcliffe: We estimate that there are just over 800,000 employers that do not have adequate dispute resolution procedures in place at this time. 97 per cent. of those firms with inadequate procedures have less than 20 employees.

The statutory dispute resolution procedures (as set out in draft Regulations, under the Employment Act 2002, which were published on 9 July 2003) are planned to come into force in October 2004. The implementation of these procedures will be supported by a broad, wide-reaching information and guidance campaign, in partnership with a range of small firms organisations and other advisory bodies. The campaign aims to ensure that all small firm employers are informed about the new requirements in time to implement them.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has had from small and medium-sized enterprises concerning requirements expected to come into force in 2004 to compel staff wishing to pursue a complaint to go through internal dispute resolution procedures before going to a tribunal. [125823]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The framework for these new dispute resolution procedures was established in the 2002 Employment Act. This was preceded by an extensive public consultation, involving many small and medium-sized firms.

The Government are currently consulting on draft Regulations that will bring these dispute resolution procedures into effect. The draft Regulations were developed with considerable input from an Advisory Group, which included representatives from the Small Business Council, the Small Business Service, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Forum for Private Business. Moreover, in line with Cabinet Office guidelines, two focus groups were held with small businesses to test the proposals.

The ongoing consultation on these draft Regulations will last for 16 weeks until 29 October 2003. We hope to collect more views from small firms, and other organisations, during this time.

Mail Order Companies

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what restrictions there are on mail order companies debiting customers' credit cards where they are unable to give a date when the goods will be available. [125622]

Mr. Sutcliffe: There are no restrictions on mail order companies debiting consumers' credit cards in the circumstances described. However, consumers are protected by the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations 2000 which stipulate that unless the parties have agreed otherwise, the supplier must deliver the goods within 30 days; and that if the goods are unavailable the consumer must be informed and reimbursed.

Nuclear Industry

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government has to support research and development in the nuclear industry. [125581]

Mr. Timms: Direct DTI funding of fission research stopped in 1994 with the cessation of the fast reactor programme and there is none included in current DTI spending plans for the next three years. DTI funding is reviewed annually and will be considered next as part of the 2004 Spending Review, which covers the period 2005–08. The UK nuclear industry currently benefits from Government support for EU and OECD co-ordinated research programmes.

The Research Councils received funding from spending review 2002 for a research programme "Towards a Sustainable Energy Economy" which includes proposals to establish a National Energy Research Network and UK Energy Research Centre. A Scientific Advisory Committee has been established to advise the Councils on the emphasis and scope of the programme and of the Centre. It is however envisaged that the National Energy Research Network would cover a broad range of energy research. In addition, the Research Councils provide funding in the region of £16 million a year for fusion research.

Pension Fund Deficits

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on government liability for deficits in the pension funds of *(a)* Rolls Royce and *(b)* BAE Systems. [124905]

Jacqui Smith: The Government assumed ultimate responsibility for any outstanding liabilities of British Aerospace, which vested in its successor company on 1 January 1981 in preparation for privatisation. The Government would only become responsible for such liabilities, including those for pension fund deficits, in the event of a voluntary winding up of BAE Systems plc or an order to wind up the company by the court under the Insolvency Act.

The Government has no liability for deficits in the pension funds of Rolls-Royce.

Post Offices

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices in Leicester she has visited since 2001; and how many of those subsequently closed. [125273]

Mr. Timms: In her ministerial capacity, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, has visited one post office in Leicester since 2001. In her constituency capacity, she visits post offices as part of her normal engagements. Post office closures are an operational matter for Post Office Ltd and we do not keep data showing if post offices visited by Ministers have subsequently closed.

Public Appointments

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the appointees to the *(a)* National Consumer Council, *(b)* Hearing Aid Council, *(c)* Gas Consumer Council, *(d)* Post Office Users Council for Scotland, *(e)* Post Office Users Council for Northern Ireland, *(f)* Post Office Users Council for Wales, *(g)* English Advisory Committee on Telecommunications, *(h)* Scottish Advisory Committee on Telecommunications, *(i)* Northern Ireland Committee on Telecommunications, *(j)* Economic and Social Research Council, *(k)* Medical Research Council, *(l)* Natural Environmental Research Council, *(m)* Advisory Committee on Coal Research, *(n)* Energy Advisory Panel, *(o)* Measurement Advisory Committee, *(p)* Overseas Project Board, *(q)* London & Southeast Industrial Development Board, *(r)* Northwest Industrial Development Board *(s)* Southwest Industrial Development Board and *(t)* Eastern Region Industrial Development Board; and which of the appointees to each body are from ethnic minorities. [122992]

Ms Hewitt: The membership of the bodies listed is as follows. An asterisk indicates appointees who have declared that they are from the black or minority ethnic communities:

National Consumer Council

Deirdre Mutton—Chair
Robert Chilton—Vice Chair
Graeme Millar
Viv Sugar
Stephen Costello
Mark Boleat
Andrew Dilnot
Dianne Hayter
Sir Christopher Kelly
Stephen Locke
Julie Mellor
Julia Unwin

Hearing Aid Council

John Raine—Chair
Anthony Corcoran
Christine Pearce
Deepak Prasher*
Victoria Skeels
Jonathan Ormerod
Maurice Hawthorne
Mark Georgevic
Margaret Hughes
Denise Yates
Huw Thomas
John Irwin
Peter Ormerod

Energywatch

Ann Robinson—Chair
Allan Asher—Chief Executive
Andrew Horsier
Bob Wilkinson
John Hanlon
Les Roberts
Neil Menzies
Sharon Darcy
Tim Cole

Postwatch

National Council Appointees:

Peter Carr—Chair
Moi Ali*
Dr. Diane Bailey
Ann Foster
Clara Arokiasamy*

Council appointees who are also regional chairs

Dr. Tom Begg QBE JP—Scotland
John Stringer OBE—Northern Ireland
Eifion Pritchard QPM—Wales
Judith Donovan CBE—Northern England
Kay Dixon—Greater London
Dr. Charles Winstanley—East of England
Richard Wand—Midlands
Dr. David Bland OBE—South East England
Charles Howeson—South and West

English advisory committee on telecommunications

Moira Black CBE—Chair
Peter Collins
Siva Lingham-Moodley*
Robert Little
Brian Love
Barbara McClennan
Brian McNally
Peter Sayers
James Woodward-Nutt

Scottish advisory committee on telecommunications

Jeremy Mitchell—Chair
Christopher Griffith
Mark Hagger
Kenneth Murray
Wendy Reynolds
Alastair Robertson
Barry Stevens

Northern Ireland advisory committee on telecommunications

Courtenay Thompson—Chair
John Campbell
Brian St. John Collins
Moore Kennedy
Ian McPherson
Seamus Magee
Jean McVitty

Economic and Social Research Council

Frances Cairncross—Chair
Professor Ian Diamond—Chief Executive
Professor Patricia Broadfoot
Professor Andrew Chesher
Ms Bronwyn Curtis
Professor Haydn Ellis
Mr. Stuart Etherington
Mr. Paul Johnson
Ms Eileen MacKay
Ms Marianne Neville-Rolfe
Professor Robin Wensley
Professor Steve Wilks
Professor Sir Alan Wilson

Medical Research Council

Sir Anthony Cleaver—Chair
Professor Sir George Radda—Chief Executive
Dr. E. Mac Armstrong
Sir William Castell
Professor Kay Davies
Professor R M Denton
Dr. Peter Fellner
Professor Ray Fitzpatrick
Derek Flint
Dr. Ruth Hall
Professor Ian MacLennan
Professor Alan North
Professor Sir John Pattison
Professor Genevra Richardson
Professor Nancy Rothwell
Professor John Savill

Natural Environment Research Council

Rob Margetts—Chair
Professor John Lawton—Chief Executive
Professor Malcolm Anderson
Chris Andrews
Professor John Beddington
Professor Valerie Brown
Pamela Castle
Professor Howard Dalton
Professor Trevor Davies
Professor Anne Glover
Richard Hardman
Dr. Colin Hicks
Edwin Tenner
Mrs Karen Morgan
Professor Judith Petts
Professor David Read

Advisory Committee on Cleaner Coal Technologies

Peter Cooper
Mike Evans
Dr. Mike Parley
Ken Ferguson
Dr. Chris Green
John Griffiths
Professor John McMullan
Nick Otter
Brian Ricketts
Paul Setchfield
Professor Jim Williamson

Energy Advisory Panel

Sir John Collins—Chair
Dr. Christopher Anastasi
Peter Lehmann CBE
Professor John Chesshire OBE
Dr. Catherine Mitchell
Tony Cooper
Hugh Mortimer
Dr. Nigel Evans
David Green MBE
Peter Nicholls
Dr. Dieter Helm
Mike Parker OBE
Dr. Paul Jefferiss
Professor Kenneth Vowles OBE
Professor Alexander Kemp
Dr. Anthony White

Measurement Advisory Committee

Dr. Colin Gaskell CBE Chair
Dr. Penny Allisy-Roberts QBE
Mr. Mike Buckley
Dr. Peter Cowley
Prof Les Ebdon
Dr. David Ellix
Prof Ken Grattan
Mr. David Holmwood
Dr. Alan Johnson
Dr. Roger Jones
Mr. John Latham
Mr. Steve Lower
Dr. Julia King
Dr. John Tyrer
Mr. Richard Freeman
Dr. Janet Townsend

London and South East Industrial Development Board

John McCready—Chair
Thomas Cohen
Peter Croucher
Praful Davda*
Bryan Davies
Gurbinder Gill*
Jim Hicks
Wendy Hyde
Mei Sim Lai*
Helen Sasson
Robert Stiles
Indeer Jeet Sodhi*
Graeme Wyles

North West Industrial Development Board

Lorraine Clinton—Chair
John Dixon
John Alcock
Raymond Armstrong
John Cackett
David McCall
Duncan Mcllan
Kirit Pathak QBE*
George Verghese*
Eva Wisemark
Dr. Marcus Wood

South West Industrial Development Board

Ian Lowe—Chair
Dr. Susan Astbury
Ruth Bagley
Dr. Richard Brown
Alan Courts
John Crownshaw
Ian Douglas
Neville Gibson
Alan Hayman
Richard Morgan
Rama Nand-Lal
Victoria Pickering
Nigel Randall
Brian Sherwin
Terence Slater
Barbara Speirs

Eastern Region Industrial Development Board

Elaine Oddie—Chair
David Baggott
Alan Davies
Robert Downing
Martin Gould
Keith Hamilton
Terence Hill
Shaz Khan OBE*
Hugh Lawson
Laurence Russen
Mike Smith

Notes:

1. The Gas Consumer Council has been replaced by the Gas and Electricity Consumer Council (better known as Energywatch)
2. Postwatch (also known as the Consumer Council for Postal Services) took the place of the Post Office Users Council for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales and also the Post Office Users National Council.
3. We have no trace of the Advisory Committee on Coal Research—we have however attached details of the membership of the Advisory Committee on Cleaner Coal Technologies.
4. We have no trace of the Overseas Project Board.

Renewable Energy

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what target she has set for the percentage of renewable energy use by *(a)* 2010 and *(b)* 2020. [125584]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is as follows:

(a) The Renewables Obligation which the Government introduced in April 2002, places an obligation on all licensed electricity suppliers to supply a specified proportion of electricity from renewables. We have set a target for electricity generated from renewable sources to reach 10 per cent. by 2010.

(b) The Energy White Paper—Our energy future—creating a low carbon economy published in February 2003 reinforces the Government's commitment to renewable forms of energy. Our aspiration is that by 2020, 20 per cent. of the UK's electricity needs will be met from renewable sources.

Richard Roberts Ltd.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when in October 2002 officials of the Department of Trade and Industry's Insolvency Department met the CEO of Richard Roberts Ltd. to discuss redundancy payments for the unemployed workers in Leicester; what the original amount was that the Department of Trade and Industry agreed to pay for the Richard Roberts Company's insolvency in the Leicester factory in October 2002; and by when the Department of Trade and Industry intends to pay the agreed amount. [125661]

Mr. Sutcliffe: My officials concerned with redundancy payments have held a number of meetings with the Finance Director of Richard Roberts Ltd. but have not met the Chief Executive Officer. The Redundancy Payments Office agreed to make payments to former employees of the company, initially of £750,000 and subsequently a further £1,250,000, a total of £2,000,000. The office has already made payments in excess of the agreed amount.

Trading Standards

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many Stop Now Orders have been issued since June 2000; and if she will make a statement. [125827]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Since June 2001 when the Stop Now Orders (EC Directive) Regulations came into force, seven Stop Now Orders have been sought and obtained from the courts. Four of these were obtained by Trading Standards authorities and three by the Office of Fair Trading.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints have been received alleging unfair contract terms under the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999 in each year since 1997; how many of these complaints have been open for more than two years; and how many successful prosecutions there have been in each year since 1997. [125825]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Office of Fair Trading's (OFT) figures for complaints by calendar years are:

1997: 1,045

1998: 1,110

1999: 1,359

2000: 1,202

2000: 1,179

2002: 1,048

Figures for the last two financial years are:

2001-02: 1,076

2002-03: 1,055

At the end of the last financial year, 125 cases had been open for over two years.

OFT has no power to undertake prosecutions as such for the use of unfair terms. Its power is to seek injunctions to prevent the use of unfair terms. But OFT may accept undertakings not to use unfair terms in lieu of seeking injunctions and in nearly all cases it secures such improvements in standard contract terms in this way, through consultation and negotiation. Since 1995, OFT has secured some 900 undertakings from businesses not to use unfair terms. These undertakings govern the use of some 5,000 unfair terms. In only one case, that of 'Director General of Fair Trading *v.* First National Bank', has the OFT had to take legal action to stop the use of a term it considered unfair. In that case, the House of Lords reversed the decision of the Court of Appeal and decided that the term in question was not unfair.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many undertakings she has received from businesses to desist from unfair trading; how many subsequent breaches of these undertakings there have been; and how many have been prosecuted for breach of undertaking; [125826]

(2) if she will set out the procedures in place for monitoring undertakings given by businesses to desist from unfair trading. [125828]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Under the Stop Now Orders (EC Directive) Regulations 2001, there have been 26 undertakings (12 by the Office of Fair Trading and 14 by Trading Standards authorities) received against business breaching consumer protection legislation. The DTI do not receive undertakings from business under these Regulations.

As a result of breaches of the undertaking, seven cases gone to court and Stop Now Orders obtained. A breach of a Stop Now Order in one case resulted in the trader been found guilty of contempt of court.

Supermarkets

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment her Department has made of the effects of below-cost selling by supermarkets; [125683]

(2) what assessment her Department has made of the impact on the UK grocery retail sector of introducing measures to *(a)* prohibit below-cost selling by supermarkets and *(b)* to ensure transparency in contracts between supermarkets and supplies; [125684]

(3) what measures her Department will take *(a)* to ensure transparency in commercial dealings between supermarkets and their suppliers and *(b)* to prohibit below-cost selling by supermarkets. [125685]

Mr. Sutcliffe *[holding answers 14 July 2003]:* The Competition Commission (CC) monopoly report 'Supermarkets: A Report on the Supply of Groceries from multiple stores in the United Kingdom' was published on 10 October 2000. The CC concluded that the practice of persistent below-cost selling when conducted by supermarkets with market power, operates against the public interest. However, the CC stated that remedies to prevent below cost selling would require monitoring and intervention that would be disproportionate to the adverse effects they were designed to remedy. Therefore the CC made no recommendations for remedial action.

Following the CC's report, the four supermarkets with a market share of 8 per cent. or over (Sainsbury, Asda Wal-Mart, Tesco and Safeway) gave legally binding undertakings to comply with a Code of Practice governing relations with their suppliers. The Code is intended to provide a framework for dealings between supermarkets and their suppliers. Terms of business must be transparent and available in writing.

Supermarkets will not be able to change agreed terms without giving the supplier notice or compensation. The Code also includes a provision for an independent mediator, paid for by the supermarkets, to resolve disputes about the Code if the parties cannot do so themselves.

The Office of Fair Trading is currently reviewing the Supermarket Code of Practice. They are expected to report later this summer. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will wait for the results of that review before deciding if any action is necessary.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will take steps to replace the supermarket Code of Practice with a statutory requirement for suppliers to offer the same contractual terms to all grocery retailers; [125681]

(2) what measures her Department will take to revise the Supermarket Code of Practice. [125682]

Mr. Sutcliffe *[holding answers 14 July 2003]:* Under UK competition law it is the responsibility of the Office of Fair Trading to review undertakings which arise from adverse findings in a monopoly investigation. The OFT is currently reviewing the Supermarket Code of Practice. They are expected to report later this summer. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will wait for the results of that review before deciding if any action is necessary.

Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment Directive

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the companies and organisations that have made representations to her about the effect of the implementation of the Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment Directive on the printer ink and toner cartridge recycling industry. [125332]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 11 July 2003]*: Following a recent press article about these issues, my Department has received over fifty letters from the cartridge refilling industry and others, including a number from Cartridge World franchisees. My officials will be meeting the UK Cartridge Recycling Association later this month to discuss their concerns. They are also due to meet representatives of the larger cartridge manufacturers shortly.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effect of the implementation of the Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment Directive on the printer ink and toner cartridge recycling industry. [125386]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* The EU Waste Electrical and Electronic Directive (the WEEE Directive) does not prevent the reuse or refilling of printer cartridges.

A number of printer ink and toner cartridge refill businesses have raised the concern, following a recent press article, that their operations may be put at risk if the scope of the Directive does not include these goods. My Department is looking at the points they have raised, bearing in mind our support for the reuse of printer cartridges and our desire to see this continue. My officials will shortly be meeting representatives of the cartridge recycling industry to explore their concerns.

The refill industry has raised with us concerns related to existing technology applied to some of the goods currently sold, which prevents reuse. However, the WEEE Directive does not affect this.

The European Commission has made clear that printer cartridges do not fall within the scope of the WEEE Directive, but considers that forthcoming EU legislation on eco-design may address the issues here. The Government agree with this assessment. In the meantime, if the spread of new technology specifically to prevent reuse begins to impinge significantly on the independent refill market, I would want to consider what additional action might be warranted.

World Trade Organisation

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she will take to ensure that at the next World Trade Organisation meeting the issues to which developing countries give priority are resolved before consideration is given to the new issues, objected to by developing countries at Doha. [125903]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We agree that it is necessary to address developing countries' interests as a matter of priority to ensure that the Doha Development Agenda is truly a development round.

We hope to see the WTO Ministerial in Cancun secure agreement to a package of measures of interest to developing countries, including progress on agriculture and agreement on TRIPS and Public Health and on a series of measures on special and differential treatment.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Department since 29 October 2002. [126605]

Ms Hewitt: Up to 15 July, 72 written ministerial statements have been made by my Department.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

National Women's Conference (Iraq)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister for Women if she will make a statement on the national women's conference in Iraq on 9 July. [126394]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to my written statement of 15 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 17–18WS.

Armed Services

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister for Women what recent discussions she has had with the Minister for the armed forces with regard to the recruitment of women into the armed services. [124795]

Ms Hewitt: I have not had specific discussions with my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces about the recruitment of women into the armed forces. However, I understand that in FY 2002/03, the armed forces gained 3,230 new women recruits, an increase of 540 over the previous year.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the impact on Northern Ireland's agricultural industry of the outcome of the mid-term review of the Common Agricultural Policy. [125845]

Mr. Pearson: I believe the agreement that has been reached is a good deal for Northern Ireland farmers. It creates a long term stable policy environment and will introduce a new era for the farming industry, with a much greater emphasis on production in response to the market. The option to fully decouple subsidies will free producers from farming for subsidies and provide a much more market-orientated approach. The days when farmers had to maintain, sometimes at a loss, a certain number of cattle or sheep to qualify for subsidies will shortly be at an end.

Most importantly, the provision for regional discretion gives Northern Ireland sufficient flexibility in the implementation of the new arrangements to ensure outcomes which reflect fully the needs of its agricultural industry.

On modulation, the UK will receive back at least 80 per cent. of the modulation monies raised, compared with 66 per cent. in the original Commission proposal.

In the dairy sector, the agreement is closer to what the industry wanted. Quotas will be retained until 2014–15, the quota increases originally suggested for 2007 and 2008 havebeen suspended pending an outlook report to be conducted after the reforms are implemented, and the support price cuts, although starting a year earlier, are not as large as originally proposed, while compensation for the price cuts has been increased from 50 per cent. to over 80 per cent.

The proposal for cereal price cuts reform was rejected and the only change is that monthly increments are halved. This will have minimal impact in Northern Ireland.

It is not possible at this stage to accurately assess the impact of the deal on the industry. Many technical details remain to be finalised and there is uncertainty over the extent to which other countries will decouple. One of the expected benefits from a decoupled system is that, while production will fall, prices will rise. We will need to undertake substantialeconomic analysis and modelling before we agree final decisions with the industry.

Drugs Use (Education)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what funding has been allocated to educate young people in *(a)* North Belfast and *(b)* Northern Ireland against the dangers of drug use in each year since 1997. [123803]

Jane Kennedy: It is not possible to quantify the amount of money spent on drug education for young people in schools, as drug education programmes are, for the most part, delivered as part of the statutory curriculum and funded through schools' normal LMS budgets. Additional funding has been provided as set out in the table. It is not possible to identify separately funding allocated to North Belfast.

£

Financial year	*Programme*	[1] *Greater Belfast area*	*Northern Ireland*
1997–98	Northern Ireland Drugs Campaign—Classroom resources/in-service training;	5,000	25,000
	[2] European Social Fund (ESF) assistance (through the Department for Employment and Learning) for nine Projects, which include drug education.	69,940	—
1998–99	[2] ESF assistance	196,647	160,475
1999–2000	[2] ESF assistance	466,876	177,785
2000–01	[2] ESF assistance; Northern Ireland Drugs Strategy, including:	312,644	—
	Education and Library Board Drug Education Projects—employment of field officers to develop resources and provide training;	70,000	408,000
	Public information campaigns;	—	[3] 81,000
	Other (non DE) projects and programmes with an educational focus;		[3] 287,500
2001–02	[2] ESF assistance NI Drug Strategy (as above:	250,008	—
	Education and Library Board Drug Education Projects;	63,000	374,000
	Public Information Campaigns;	—	184,500
	Other (non DE) programmes and projects	—	[3] 600,778
2002–03	[2] ESF assistance;	171,004	73,468
	Public Information Campaigns	—	[3] 437,955
	DE—Continuation funding for Inter Board Project;	42,000	235,000
	Other (non DE) projects and programmes	[2,4] 264,252	[3] 993,888
2003–04	[2] ESF assistance;	110,515	215,391
	DE funding for ELB Projects (Not yet allocated)	76,000	425,000
2002–04	Northern Ireland Drug and Alcohol Strategy—activities agreed by the Education and Prevention Working Group	[5] —	[6] 350,000
			[7] 325,000
			[8] 35,000

[1] It is not possible to identify separately the North Belfast component of expenditure.

[2] It is not possible to identify separately funding for the Drug Education component of expenditure.

[3] (DHSSPS)

[4] (DEL)

[5] Cannot be separately identified.

[6] Public Information Campaigns.

[7] Training for Educators.

[8] Revision of 'Misuse of Drugs' pack.

Energy Industry

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the long term contracts for Ballylumford power station and the Moyle interconnector have been refinanced; and what discussions he has had on the refinancing of the Scotland to Northern Ireland natural gas pipeline. [125190]

Mr. Pearson: In 2000, the Ballylumford power station contract, entered into at the time of privatisation in 1992, was refinanced through a customer buyout.

The Moyle interconnector was refinanced as a result of its sale on 14 April 2003, to a fully debt financed, not for profit company.

The Northern Ireland Authority for Energy Regulation is currently in discussion with the owners of the Northern Ireland to Scotland gas pipeline about the scope for introducing a similar not for profit structure for that interconnector.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will refinance the Ballylumford power station and the Moyle interconnector within the Northern Ireland energy industry. [125191]

Mr. Pearson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers I gave him today to Question references 125190 and 125192.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action the Government have taken to minimise the cost to Northern Ireland electricity customers of energy industry debt; what the Government's plans are for reducing this cost on electricity customers; and when he estimates customers will benefit. [125192]

Mr. Pearson: A working party of economists drawn from the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Northern Ireland Authority for Energy Regulation has been examining options for the refinancing of energy assets and contracts, with a view to energy cost reductions for the consumer. It is expected to report shortly.

The findings of the working group and the outcomes of the consultation papers "Competition and Customer Empowerment" published by the Regulator on 4 March 2003 and "Towards a New Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland" published by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on 17 April 2003 will shape future announcements in this area.

Higher Education

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what aspects of the Higher Education White Paper will be extended to Northern Ireland; and what the timetable is for the implementation of its proposals. [125538]

Jane Kennedy: It is my intention to consider carefully the implications for Northern Ireland of the DfES White Paper on the future of Higher Education in England over the next few months; to take into consideration the outcomes of the consultation process in England and discussions with local stakeholders including the Northern Ireland Higher Education Council; and to bring forward recommendations on the way forward in Northern Ireland in due course.

Post-primary Education

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the future of post-primary education in Northern Ireland. [125535]

Jane Kennedy: I have established a working group to provide advice and recommendations on options for future arrangements for post-primary education. The group has been asked to report by 31 October 2003. Decisions on future post-primary arrangements will not be taken until the group's advice has been considered.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Terrorism Act (Passenger Information)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps the Government have taken to achieve international co-ordination of the passenger information required at ports of entry under section 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000; [124756]

(2) what progress has been made by the Government in putting in place the IT and other systems necessary to achieve successful implementation at UK airports of the requirements of section 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000. [124757]

Mr. Blunkett: The Government has consulted a number of other countries, including the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico and the EU countries, about the implementation of the Schedule 7 to the Terrorism Act 2000 (Information) Order 2002.

We are making good progress on implementation and the police are working closely with Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and the Immigration Service to ensure a cohesive approach to the collection of information at all ports.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the average time taken between an application for an antisocial behaviour order and its subsequent court hearing in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* the West Midlands; [122781]

(2) what actions have been taken to reduce the length of time between application for antisocial behaviour orders and their subsequent hearing. [122782]

Ms Blears: Information on the length to time taken between an application for an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) and its subsequent hearing is not routinely collected. However, since ASBOs became available in April 1999, the Government has identified that in some cases the time between an application for an ASBO being made and the order being granted was too long.

As such, we have taken a range of measures under the Police Reform Act 2002 to improve the effectiveness of ASBOs, enabling the courts to protect communities

more quickly. Interim orders can be made at the same time as an ASBO application, orders on conviction and county court orders can avoid the need for a separate court hearing.

In addition, the Government is working with agencies to spread good practice, the Judicial Studies Board has produced training to improve the courts' understanding and implementation of ASBOs and the Home Office has issued guidance to enable practitions to implement the Police Reform Act 2002 changes more effectively.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long on average it took the Immigration and Nationality Directorate to process applications for *(a)* asylum, *(b)* indefinite leave to remain and *(c)* citizenship in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [125102]

Beverley Hughes:

(a) Asylum

The average time between an asylum application and initial decision was six months for initial decisions made in the financial year 2002–03, compared with 20 months for April 1997. This has been calculated using all cases for which data are available, including older cases decided as part of the reduction of the number of outstanding cases, as well as new cases decided as part of normal work in progress.

Information on the proportion of cases decided, up to and including final appeal, within six months, will be published in the Home Office's Annual Report in order to report on the Public Service Agreement (PSA) target 7 published in July 2002. Due to the nature of the target, performance data will not be available until more than six months following the relevant financial year. For example (subject to data quality) it is planned that performance against financial year 2003–04 will be reported at the end of November 2004, although provisional figures for applications made between April 2003 and September 2003 will be available earlier.

Provisional data show that 73 per cent. of applications received in the period April to December 2002 had initial decisions reached and served within two months. 42 per cent. of asylum appeals received by the Immigration Appellant Authority in the period April to December 2002 were determined within 17 weeks (including those appeals also dealt with by the second tier of the IAA).

Information on the proportion of new substantive applications with initial decisions made and served within two months, and information on the proportion of appeals received by the IAA which are dealt with within four months, is published in the quarterly asylum statistics, copies of which are available from the Library, published at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

(b) Indefinite leave to remain (settlement)

There are no published data on decision times to determine applications for settlement. Our aim is to decide all straightforward applications within three weeks. Currently straightforward applications are being decided on initial consideration within three–four weeks on average. Most applications that cannot be decided on initial consideration are being decided within six months but because of the high intake there are some that are taking around 12 months to decide.

(c) Citizenship

Information on the current waiting times for citizenship applications are available on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate website www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/default.asp?PageId=16, and is periodically updated. As at July 2003 the average length of time for a citizenship application to be processed in nine months.

Civil Defence

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to ensure that the emergency services are prepared to deal with a terrorist attack in the UK. [124412]

Mr. Blunkett: The UK has the necessary plans in place in the interests of national security and the protection of the public. The Government's preparations include a series of classified contingency plans for responding to a wide range of terrorist threats. These plans are regularly tested, reviewed and updated in the light of changing circumstances; this ensures that all agencies involved are prepared to respond to a terroristincident.

The response to any terrorist incident relies upon a co-ordinated approach and the Government draws upon the resources and expertise of Government Departments, the security and intelligence agencies, the police, the military, the emergency services, local authorities and scientific and other specialist advice as necessary.

I set out further details of the steps we have taken in my written Ministerial Statements on 3 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 72WS, 20 March 2003, column 51WS, and 3 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 25WS.

My hon. Friend may also wish to refer to the generic guidance contained in the publication "Dealing with Disaster" which can be found on the UK Resilience website (www.ukresilience.info) and the Home Office website (www.homeoffice.gov.uk/terrorism).

Immigration

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will change the immigration rules to allow those with leave to remain of more than one year to submit family re-union applications. [125106]

Beverley Hughes: There is provision within the Immigration Rules for the family members of those persons admitted to the UK for the purpose of studies, training or work experience or employment to accompany or join them here. There is no qualifying period for family reunion applications under the non-asylum categories of the Immigration Rules.

Family members of those recognised as refugees may apply immediately to join the sponsor in the UK. Family members of those granted Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave can apply to join them once the sponsor has been granted indefinite leave to remain. Those granted Humanitarian Protection are eligible to apply for indefinite leave after three years, and

most of those with Discretionary Leave after six years. However, applications for family reunion may be considered before the sponsor has been granted indefinite leave to remain in those cases where there are compelling, compassionate circumstances. There is no intention to reduce the time qualification period for family reunion applications.

Mr. Nadhmi Auchi

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 19 May, *Official Report*, column 645W, on Mr. Nadhmi Auchi, (1) how many representations were received; who made the representations; and what the basis was of each representation; [118615]

(2) when he will reply to the question from the honourable Member for North Norfolk for written answer on Monday 16th June concerning Mr.Nadhmi Auchi. [125292]

Caroline Flint: I have replied today to the hon. Member's letter of 27 May about the case of Mr. Nadhmi Auchi, explaining that it is not our policy or practice to disclose either the names of those who take up a particular case or the basis on which they choose to do so.

What I can say in an attempt to assist, is that any such representations as were to the general effect that an Authority to Proceed against Mr Auchi should not be issued. The full chronology of those who took up his case with us was as follows:

11 September 2000

An honourable Member made some factual enquiries.

15 September 2000

Mr. Audi's solicitors wrote to the Home Office.

9 October 2000

A second honourable Member wrote to Ministers at the Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

25 October 2000,5 June 2001, 9 August, 2001 and on 17 October 2001

Mr. Auchi's solicitors wrote to the Home Office.

National Asylum Support Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the findings of the independent review into the National Asylum Support Service announced on 7 March. [124969]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to my written ministerial statement on 15 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 30WS.

Work Permits

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the occupations were for which in-country work permits were issued in 2002, broken down by *(a)* number, *(b)* percentage share of the total number of work permits issued and *(c)* country of origin of recipients; [123777]

(2) what the primary occupations were for those to whom work permits were granted out of country to enter the UK in 2002, broken down by *(a)* number, *(b)* percentage share of the total number of work permits issued and *(c)* country of origin of recipients. [123778]

Beverley Hughes: Figures for the primary occupations for which the most in-country and out-of-country work permit applications have been issued in 2002, include figures for the top five nationalities for each occupation.

The total number of out-of-country work permits issued for 2002 is 89,049. This is 58 per cent. of the total figure for all work permits issued in 2002.

A copy of the tables will be placed in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Consultation Documents

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the consultation documents issued by the Scotland Office in each of the last four years; what the cost was of producing each of these; how many documents were issued in each consultation; and how many responses were received in each consultation. [124564]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office has issued two consultation documents since 1999. The following table lists the requested information in respect of each document:

	2001 The Size of the Scottish Parliament A Consultation	*2002 Sunday Working in Scotland A Consultation*
Cost (£)	1,007	331
Copies issued	783	200
Responses received	237	138

Departmental Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the cost was to his Department for *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers, *(b)* taxis, *(c)* train travel, *(d)* the use of helicopters, *(e)* airline tickets and *(f)* chartered aeroplanes in each year since 1997. [123080]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office was established on 1 July 1999.

The cost of ministerial cars and drivers will be addressed in a letter from Mr. Nick Matheson, the Chief Executive of the Government Car and Despatch Agency, to the hon. Member.

The cost of taxis for the Scotland Office was £9,244 in 1999–2000; £16,519 in 2000–01; £13,543 in 2001–02 and £15,266 (estimated) in 2002–03.

The cost of rail travel was £37,970 in 1999–2000; £41,998 in 2000–01; £54,882 in 2001–02; and £70,140 (estimated) in 2002–03.

The cost of air travel was £126,704 in 1999–2000; £227,024 in 2000–01; £222,568 in 2001–02 and £216,269 (estimated) in 2002–03.

No expenditure has been incurred on the use of helicopters or chartered planes since 1 July 1999.

All official travel was undertaken in accordance with the rules contained in the departmental staff handbook and all Ministerial travel is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the cost was to his Department of mobile phones supplied to ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123135]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office was established on 1 July 1999.

Since that date the cost of mobile phones supplied to ministers and officials was as follows:

Year	£
1999–2000	6,464
2000–01	17,566
2001–02	8,174
2002–03	10,135

Partnership Agreements

Angela Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether she plans to conclude a partnership agreement with the trade unions representing the staff in her Department. [117454]

Mrs. McGuire: Most staff in the Scotland Office are on loan from the Scottish Executive, which has a partnership agreement with the trade unions. The Scotland Office currently operates within the framework of that agreement.

Private Office Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the running costs have been of Ministers' private offices in his Department in each year since 1997. [123108]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office was established on 1 July 1999.

In the period 1 July 1999 to 31 March 2000 the costs of running the ministerial private offices were not recorded separately. The costs of running Ministerial private offices after March 2000 were:

	£
2000–01	522,721
2001–02	614,146
2002–03 (est.)	594,486

Security

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many documents are held by her Department that are subject to security classification, broken down by category of classification. [107358]

Mrs. McGuire: I refer my hon. Friend to the Answer given by my hon. Friend, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, on 7 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 696W.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff were employed by her Department in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [106977]

Mrs. McGuire: I refer the hon. Member to the Answer given by my hon. Friend, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, on 4 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 891W.

Travel Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the cost was of travel by train by staff in her Department in 2002. [106345]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office follows the conditions set out in the Civil Service Management Code which requires departments and agencies to ensure that staff use the most efficient and economical means of travel in the circumstances, taking into account any management benefit or the needs of staff with disabilities.

The estimated cost of rail travel by staff in the Department in 2002–03 is £70,140.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Scotland Office since 29 October 2002. [126615]

Mrs. McGuire: Three.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Document Classification

Harry Cohen: To ask the Advocate-General how many documents are held by her Department that are subject to security classification, broken down by category of classification. [107363]

The Advocate-General: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, 7 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 696W.

Information Technology

Dr. Pugh To ask the Advocate-General (1) what new IT projects with a value in excess of £10,000 the Department has authorised in the last three financial years; [124246]

(2) how much the Department spent on IT *(a)* licences, *(b)* hardware, *(c)* maintenance and *(d)* software in the financial year 2002–03. [124247]

The Advocate-General: The information can be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General how many staff were employed by her Department in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [106976]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 4 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 891W.

Staff Travel

Mr. John Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General what the cost was of travel by train by staff in her Department in 2002. [106344]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Scotland.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

Abdullah Rehmani

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to locate the file of Mr. Abdullah Rehmani, the husband of Mrs. Baluch of Leicester, a constituent, and make a determination on the application. [125778]

Mr. Mullin: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Ambassadors for British Business

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Ambassadors for British Business he has appointed since 2001. [125781]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: None.

British Nationals (Military Trials)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of *(a)* the evidence, *(b)* the sources of the evidence and *(c)* the charges which the US military authorities intend to use in the cases of (i) Moazzam Begg and (ii) Feroz Abassi. [124981]

Mr. Mullin: Mr. Begg and Mr. Abbasi have been designated as eligible for Military Commissions, but have not yet been charged. We have not had access to the information on which the designations have been based. We have made clear to the US authorities that we expect the process to comply with minimum fair trial standards under international law, including those relating to the examination of evidence.

Burma

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the government of Burma on the situation in Karen; and if he will make a statement. [125806]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We regularly press bilaterally with the Burmese regime and in international fora for a rapid improvement in the human rights situation for all the people of Burma. In April this year we co-sponsored the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights resolution on Burma which highlighted the disproportionate suffering of members of ethnic minorities, including the Karen. We will continue to put pressure on the Burmese military to move towards democracy and respect for human rights.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the value of imports of gems and precious stones from Burma was in the past two financial years; and which companies imported these gems and precious stones. [125926]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: According to official statistics from HM Customs and Excise, no gems and precious stones have been imported to the UK from Burma in the past two financial years.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further measures have recently been discussed by the EU in response to the recent crackdown in Burma. [125928]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: With EU colleagues we strengthened and updated the EU Common Position on Burma on 16 June 2003. We are in regular contact with EU partners and are in discussion on what further steps we will take if the regime does not provide immediate satisfactory responses.

British Detainees (Guantanamo Bay)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much access time to *(a)* family members, *(b)* legal representatives, *(c)* religious representatives and *(d)* British Red Cross representatives is allowed to each British detainee at Camp Delta. [124632]

Mr. Mullin: The British detainees held at Guantanamo Bay are not currently allowed access to family members or legal representatives but they do have access to a Muslim cleric. The International Committee of the Red Cross has access to the detainees on request.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times Foreign Office officials have visited each British detainee at Camp Delta; and how long each meeting lasted. [124637]

Mr. Mullin: British officials have visited Guantanamo Bay on five occasions. During each visit, all the British detainees who were held at that time at Guantanamo Bay were seen individually by British officials. Each meeting lasted up to one and a half hours.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what circumstances British detainees held at Guantanamo Bay would be returned to the UK. [124232]

Mr. Mullin: We have been informed that the US authorities have not made any decision on whether or not to return the British detainees to the UK. We continue to press the United States to resolve the position of the detainees.

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions are being taken to determine the future of British citizens detained at Guantanamo Bay. [123938]

Mr. Mullin: Ministers and officials continue to have regular discussions with the United States authorities about the British detainees held at Guantanamo Bay. Two of the British detainees have been designated as eligible to be tried by Military Commissions. We have strong reservations about the Commissions. We have raised and will continue to raise these concerns energetically with the US, including with the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell.

We continue to press the United States to resolve the position of all the detainees, including the other seven British nationals in Guantanmo Bay.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his Answer of 8 July, ref.122612, on the welfare of British citizens in Guantanamo Bay, what the individual health concerns of the detainees are that the Government has raised with the US authorities; what the average delays in mail are; how much exercise the detainees are allowed; and if he will make a statement. [125800]

Mr. Straw: For reasons of confidentiality it would not be appropriate to give details of the individual health concerns of the British detainees held at Guantanamo Bay. (This is reflected in Exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information). We do keep in contact with the families concerned.

Mail can take up to four or five months. The detainees are allowed a minimum of two 15-minute periods of exercise outside every week and are also able to exercise in their cells and communal areas. Some of the detainees are allowed to exercise outside more frequently. Although we do not consider the amount of exercise allowed to be sufficient, we understand that the situation is improving. We continue to raise both these issues with the US authorities.

Channel Islands

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what recent communication he has had with the governments of *(a)* Guernsey and *(b)* Jersey; [125372]

(2) when he next plans to visit *(a)* Guernsey and *(b)* Jersey. [125373]

Mr. Lammy: I have been asked to reply.

My noble and learned Friend the Secretary of State and I have not yet had any communication with the insular authorities in Jersey or Guernsey, but we look forward to doing so and to visiting the islands when this can be arranged. However, regular content is maintained with the interior authorities by officials in my Department and continuity has been ensured.

Convention on the Future of Europe

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the reference within the draft constitution prepared by the Convention on the Future of Europe to the European Union having exclusive competence over the conservation of marine biological resources under the Common Fisheries Policy covers exclusive competence within the *(a)* six-mile and *(b)* 12-mile limits. [125712]

Mr. MacShane: The European Community has had exclusive competence over the conservation of marine biological resources under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) since 1979. This includes the six and 12-mile limit.

However, under CFP Regulation EC 2371/2002 the Community permits member states to take their own measures on the conservation of marine resources within the six and 12-mile limit provided they conform with the Common Fisheries Policy. If the proposed measures are likely to have a discriminatory effect on vessels of another member state then the Commission and the relevant member state(s) need to be consulted in advance.

The draft EU Constitutional Treaty does not alter this situation.

Darmesh and Rashik Jamiet

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he received the papers relating to Darmesh (date of birth 27 February 1973) and Rashik (8 December 1977) Jamiet from Mumbai under Ref R/02/4938–40. [125517]

Mr. Mullin: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for redeployment of members of his Department out of London and the south-east. [125391]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has no immediate plans to redeploy any of our officers although, as with all Government Departments, we regularly examine the feasibility of locating staff where it makes most qualitative and financial sense.

European Constitution

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the inclusion of the EURATOM treaty in the draft EU constitution. [125829]

Mr. MacShane: The Convention on the Future of Europe has not proposed to include the EURATOM treaty in its draft Constitutional Treaty. It proposes to keep EURATOM as a separate, free-standing treaty, but to bring some of its provisions, such as those concerning its institutions, in line with changes to the EU proposed by the Constitutional Treaty. These proposals will be discussed in the forthcoming Intergovernmental Conference.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications for the representation of British interests overseas of the appointment of an overall EU Foreign Minister. [126001]

Mr. MacShane: The EU already has a High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and an External Relations Commissioner, who represent different aspects of EU business overseas. The draft Constitution proposes the creation of a European Foreign Minister who would combine these two roles on behalf of the European Union. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary would continue to represent British interests overseas.

Independent Monitor

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many persons have applied for the post of Independent Monitor. [125780]

Mr. Mullin: There were 82 applications for the post of Independent Monitor.

Organ Trafficking

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with European colleagues regarding organ trafficking *(a)* across Europe and *(b)* on a global level; and what proposals there are to tackle this practice. [121094]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

The Department of Health, together with colleagues in the Home Office, is negotiating a draft European Union Framework Decision on the prevention and control of trafficking in human organs and tissues.

In addition, the Department has been working with the 45 member states of the Council of Europe, which includes the member states of the European Union, to develop a recommendation on steps to be taken to minimise the risk of organ trafficking throughout the area.

The United Nations has also developed an Additional Protocol to the Convention against Transnational Organised Crime dealing with the trafficking of persons. It makes it a criminal offence to traffic a person for the purpose of removing an organ. The Protocol has yet to come into force.

Departmental Policies (Pendle)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what policies *(a)* initiated and *(b)* managed by his Department since 2001 have had an impact on Pendle; and if he will make a statement. [124094]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is the United Kingdom Government Department responsible for foreign affairs. Its aim is to work for the United Kingdom's interests in a safe, just, and prosperous world. Achievement of these aims will benefit all areas of the United Kingdom, including Pendle.

More specifically, the FCO is responsible for relations with the EU. Under the 2000–06 European Structural Funding Programmes Pendle is currently receiving £2.6 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for its Objective 2, Priority 2 (People and Communities) Action Plan. This seeks to promote social and economic integration and improved living and working conditions for people in low-income, discriminated and other excluded groups.

Pendle is also receiving £0.9 million from the European Social Fund for training and employment projects complementary to projects supported under Priority 2, via direct bids to Government Office.

The wards of Boulsworth, Coates, Craven, Earby, Foulridge and Pendleside are in the Lancashire Leader Plus area which as a whole is receiving £2.2 million from the European Agriculture Guidance and Guarantee Fund to provide a greater range of local services and employment opportunities within rural communities and to open up new market opportunities for rural goods.

Pendle is in the East Lancashire Objective 2, Priority 1 Action Plan area, which as a whole is allocated £20 millon ERDF to provide business support activity to improve competitiveness across the East Lancashire area.

Public Diplomacy Team

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the size is of his public diplomacy team. [125521]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are currently 25 employees working in the Public Diplomacy Policy Department.

In 2002 there were 144 UK based staff and 144.41 locally engaged staff who spend 50–100 per cent. of their time covering this function in our overseas Posts. The figures are not yet available for this year.

Zimbabwe (Elias Mudzuri)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department has made representations to the Government of Zimbabwe about the recent arrest of Elias Mudzuri; what further action his Department intends to take; and if he will make a statement. [126121]

Mr. Straw: The British High Commission in Harare have been in close touch with Mr. Mudzuri throughout this episode. He has not asked us to make representations on his behalf. We are well aware of the Government of Zimbabwe's persistent harassment of key opposition figures like Mr. Mudzuri. He briefed FCO officials, during a visit to the UK in June, on the considerable difficulties he faces. We underlined that we would continue to support all Zimbabweans working for a return to democracy and the rule of law. We will continue to monitor developments closely.

DEFENCE

Service Accommodation (Council Tax)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what procedure is in place to assist those service personnel who are paying both contributions in lieu of council tax and full council tax on a private residence, and require representations making to their local authority for a council tax reduction. [126058]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence writes to the local authority in support of the representation.

Deepcut Barracks

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the extent of the supply and use of illicit drugs at Deepcut barracks over the last five years; how many personnel were tested; how many tests proved positive; what disciplinary action resulted; and if he will make a statement. [125559]

Mr. Caplin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 11 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 1030W. Of the 24 individuals who tested positive (two tested twice on different occasions), one has been retained in Service, 14 have been administratively discharged for drug offences and nine administratively discharged for other reasons.

Defence Medical Services

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 14 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 567W, what the cost of the Defence Medical Services was in each year from 1995–96, in 2003–04 prices. [119196]

Mr. Caplin: Further to the answer of 14 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 567W, the cost of the Defence Medical Services (DMS) in each of the years from 1995–96 to 2002–03 at 2003–04 prices is as follows:

Cost of Defence Medical Services (DMS)

£

	Cost of DMS at 2003–04 prices
1995–96	405.43
1996–97	305.58
1997–98	316.11
1998–99	328.61
1999–2000	353.21
2000–01	359.67
2001–02	368.23
2002–03	407.85

Note:
These figures were calculated using the GDP deflator published by HM Treasury.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the pay differential is between doctors serving in Band three in the NHS and doctors serving in Band three posts in the DMS; and if he will make a statement. [118192]

Mr. Caplin: It is difficult to make an accurate comparison between the pay of doctors in the Defence Medical Services (DMS) and doctors in the NHS serving in Band three posts as this would depend on a number of factors, such as their stage of training and their incremental level on the pay structure. Account would also need to be taken of the X-factor paid to DMS doctors, the non-contributory nature of the armed forces pension scheme and the fact that DMS junior doctors' pay includes an element for NHS out of hours payments.

From their assessment of pay comparability following the introduction of the NHS pay Banding system on 1 December 2000, the armed forces Pay Review Body recommended a supplementary pro rata payment of £5,000 to DMS doctors under training for the period 1 December 2000 to 31 March 2002. The question of supplementary payments for subsequent years will be addressed in the Department's annual papers of evidence to the Review Body.

International Festival of the Sea

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Navy warships will be taking part in the International Festival of the Sea this year. [126137]

Mr. Caplin: HMS Southampton, HMS Tyne, HMS Example and HMS Archer took part in the Leith International Festival of the Sea between 23 and 26 May 2003.

Iraq

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long fresh troops sent to Iraq will have for acclimatisation in Iraq before being committed to operational duties; and what period is recommended in medical advice. [124359]

Mr. Ingram: Following an initial acclimatisation period of between three to five days, United Kingdom military personnel deploying to Iraq for operational duties gradually increase their work intensity in accordance with in theatre risk assessments. UK military medical advice does not specify a set acclimatisation period, however, personnel are not considered folly acclimatised until they have spent 10 days undergoing activity of a similar level, in the same environmental conditions, at which they will be expected to continue to work.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases of *(a)* dehydration and *(b)* heat exhaustion there have been among UK armed forces in Iraq since the start of the recent conflict; and whether, in any of these cases, inadequate time for acclimatisation for fresh troops in theatre has been deemed a cause. [124360]

Mr. Ingram: There have been 286 reports of heat related illnesses among British forces deployed on Operation Telic since the start of the conflict. The majority of these cases are assessed as heat stroke due to the ambient environmental conditions. Other personnel are more susceptible to heat stress as a result of the effects of another illness such as diarrhoea.

Following an initial acclimatisation period of between three to five days, United Kingdom military personnel deploying to Iraq for operational duties gradually increase their work intensity in accordance with in theatre risk assessments. UK military medical advice does not specify a set acclimatisation period, however, personnel are not considered fully acclimatised until they have spent 10 days undergoing activity of a similar level, in the same environmental conditions, at which they will be expected to continue to work. In addition, all troops are made aware of the guidance on the dangers of working in hot conditions, and the measures that are to be taken to prevent heat illness.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reservists are deployed in Iraq and Kuwait. [125597]

Mr. Caplin: As at 11 July 2003, there were 4,219 reservists mobilised to support Operation Telic. While the majority were based in the Gulf region, this figure also includes reservists directly supporting Operation Telic based elsewhere, such as in the United Kingdom, Cyprus, or Germany. A number were also either undergoing pre-deployment training or post deployment leave prior to demobilisation.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British soldiers lost their lives during the recent conflict in Iraq. [122006]

Mr. Ingram: As of 10 July 2003 43 United Kingdom service personnel had died since the start of Coalition military operations against Iraq. 34 were killed in action or subsequently died of wounds received and nine died in non-battle accidents or from natural causes.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the Iraqi prisoners of war captured by British forces have been *(a)* designated unlawful combatants and *(b)* transferred to other facilities outside Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [125799]

Mr. Ingram: As of 15 July 2003, the United States is holding one prisoner of war and 71 other persons captured by British forces, who are either suspected of committing criminal offences or are interned where necessary for imperative reasons of security in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention. All other British captured prisoners of war have been released under the supervision of British forces, and with the knowledge of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The United Kingdom does not use the designation unlawful combatant.

War Detainees

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the detainees held at *(a)* Guantanamo, *(b)* Bagram Airbase and *(c)* Diego Garcia were originally captured by British forces; and if he will make a statement. [125798]

Mr. Ingram: No detainees are held at Diego Garcia. Of the detainees held at Bagram and at Guantanamo Bay, none were captured by British forces.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was to his Department of mobile phones supplied to Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123141]

Mr. Caplin: The information requested is set out in the following table:

Cost of mobile phones supplied to Ministers and officials

£ millions

(January to December)	*Total Cost*[1]
1999	2.637
2000	2.656
2001	2.368
2002	3.395

[1] Cost of equipment, call charges and access charges.

Information for 1997 and 1998 is not available. All figures quoted are exclusive of VAT. The figures also exclude a number of Ministry of Defence users with local agreements who use other networks. Information on this expenditure is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Porton Down

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 4 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 451W, on Porton Down, if he will provide information on specific breeds from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory in a similar form to that supplied by the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency in a letter to the hon. Member for Portsmouth South of 22 July 1998 (Ref DERA/SEC/S/1/255/98). [119161]

Mr. Caplin: As my hon. Friend, the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Moonie) indicated to the hon. Member in his response of 4 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 451W, more detailed information on the specific breeds used is not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. In general terms, the breeds of animals used in scientific procedures from 1997–2002 are as follows:

Breeds of animals used in scientific procedures 1997–2002

Species	*Breeds commonly used at DSTL Porton Down*
Mouse	Mainly BALB/C, also Porton mouse, hybrids
Pig	Large White Cross
Sheep	Polled Dorset 2000 and 2001, previously mules and cross breeds
Rat	Porton Wistar
Macaque	Rhesus
Marmoset	Common
Goat	No one particular breed
Guinea pig	Dunkin Hartley
Hamster	Syrian
Rabbit	Now all New Zealand White, previously also Dutch belted.

Service Deployments

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the *(a)* Army, *(b)* RAF and *(c)* Naval Service is (i) preparing for, (ii) recovering from and (iii) deployed on operations. [125621]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

Service Personnel (Alcohol Expenditure)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent investigation he has made of alcohol consumption levels in the armed forces; and what alcohol education measures are being taken. [125506]

Mr. Caplin: There has been no recent specific investigation into alcohol consumption levels in the armed forces. The armed forces employ vigorous education programmes—including pamphlets, films and lectures—at all stages of military training and Service to promote sensible drinking, and to ensure that personnel are aware of the dangers of alcohol misuse. The programmes are regularly reviewed and updated as necessary, and are complemented by administrative and disciplinary measures to deter alcohol misuse within the Services.

Suez Medal

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many representations have been made to his Department by veterans of the Suez campaign regarding eligibility for a Suez Medal Clasp. [125941]

Mr. Caplin: Since 11 June, when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced in the House that the Naval General Service Medal 1915–62 and the General Service Medal 1918–62 would be awarded for service in the Suez Canal Zone between 1951 and 1954, the Ministry of Defence received 4,896 representations. These consisted of 4,790 applications for the medal to the four single Service medal offices, eight parliamentary questions, 44 letters from hon. Members and 54 letters from members of the public. In addition, there have been an unknown number of telephone calls to the Ministry of Defence about the new medal.

Territorial Army

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the Territorial Army remains available for mobilisation; how many TA soldiers this represents; and what proportion of the Territorial Army will be available for mobilisation at the start of 2004. [124497]

Mr. Caplin: Taking into account those personnel who have, *(a)* already been mobilised for operational deployment; *(b)* are considered not yet Fit For Role (defined as the minimum level of training required for mobilisation); *(c)* are serving on full-time reserve Service: or *(d)* have already been deployed at some point over the last three years[1]; some 12,000 soldiers, or 30 per cent. of the Territorial Army remain available for compulsory mobilisation.

This figure does not take into account those members of the TA who would be prepared to volunteer to be mobilised, which could lead to a marked increase of the overall number of personnel available for mobilisation.

It is not possible to provide an accurate picture of what this figure will be in January 2004, as too many variables exist. We continue to keep the situation under review.

[1] Members of the TA may be compulsorily mobilized for 12 months over a three-year period, extendable in certain circumstances.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Department since 29 October 2002. [126621]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence has made 108 written ministerial statements since 29 October 2002 up to and including 15 July 2003.

HEALTH

Assisted Suicide/Euthanasia

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy on the conclusions of the 1994 House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics on the legalisation of assisted suicide and euthanasia. [126040]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The question of whether of not to legalise euthanasia was considered in great detail by the House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics, reporting in 1994. The Committee concluded that the practice of euthanasia could not be supported, partly because of the difficulties in setting secure limits on voluntary euthanasia and also because of concerns that vulnerable people might feel pressure, whether real or imagined, to request early death. The Government's position has been that it shares the views of the Committee, that any proposal to change the law in this area would need to be considered very carefully and that we have no plans to change the current law.

Aston Hall Hospital

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what capital resources will be made available to ensure that the reprovisioning of Aston Hall hospital proceeds. [126061]

Dr. Ladyman: I refer my hon. Friend to the response I gave him on 1 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 227W.

Boarding Schools

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints have been received about boarding provision at *(a)* Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference and Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools boarding schools and *(b)* all boarding schools in each of the last five years. [125174]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is available only centrally since 1 April 2002, when the National Care Standards Commission came into operation.

Since April 2002, there have been six complaints about schools who are members of the Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference and Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools boarding schools and nine complaints about other boarding schools.

Cancer Services

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made to appoint more cancer nurse specialists. [124602]

Mr. Hutton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) on 10 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 1001–02W.

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much blood transfusions for cancer patients cost the NHS in each of the last five years; and what the main costs were; [123379]

(2) how many cancer patients have had their chemotherapy postponed in the last year because of bed shortages; [123380]

(3) what estimate he has made in the last year of the number of bed days that would be saved if alternatives to blood transfusions were used for cancer patients; [123381]

(4) what information on blood transfusion and its alternatives is provided to cancer patients who are being treated for anaemia-related fatigue. [123383]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information on the cost to the national health service of blood transfusions for cancer patients and on the numbers of cancer patients who have had their chemotherapy treatment postponed due to bed shortages is not collected centrally.

The Department does not collect data centrally that would enable it to make an accurate assessment of the potential economic benefits, such as saved bed days, of using alternatives to blood transfusions.

There is a national patient information leaflet published earlier this year and produced by the National Blood Service for patients who may receive a blood transfusion. The leaflet includes a section on alternatives to blood transfusions—although this is directed principally at surgical rather than cancer patients. When the leaflet is next reviewed, consideration will be given to providing more information on other possible alternatives to blood transfusion. In addition, guidance on information provision for cancer patients will be included in supportive and palliative care guidance currently being produced by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. We expect the guidance to be published early next year.

Delayed Discharge

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are waiting in hospitals in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire for placements in care homes. [123906]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not collected centrally at that level. However, at the fourth quarter of 2002–03, there were 47 people occupying an acute hospital bed and waiting for placement in a care home in the Thames Valley Health Authority area.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with local authority social services departments regarding the funding of care homes. [126094]

Dr. Ladyman: I have not yet had discussions with particular local authorities regarding the funding of care homes. I am, however, aware that the care home sector has been experiencing financial difficulties. That is why we are giving local councils record levels of funding. Resources for social services have increased by 20 per cent. in real terms between 1996–97 and 2002–03, an average of over 3 per cent. per annum and will continue to increase over the next three years by an average of 6 per cent. per annum in real terms. Local councils will be able to use these substantial extra resources to increase local provision or to rebalance the care home market and increase fee levels if that is what is needed.

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has issued to care home proprietors faced with *(a)* the need to appoint staff to meet statutory requirements and *(b)* delays in processing Criminal Records Bureau clearances. [125813]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* The Department has not issued formal guidance to care home providers about what to do when the processing application of the application for a criminal record disclosure takes longer than normal. Under the Care Standards Act all care homes in England are regulated by the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC). It is for the NCSC to satisfy itself that care homes conform to statutory requirements and the commission provides appropriate guidance to providers on meeting the requirements.

The performance of the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) has now greatly improved. In the week ending 5 July, the CRB issued 95 per cent. of standard disclosures within two weeks and 94 per cent. of enhanced disclosures within four weeks, against a service standard of 90 per cent. in each case.

However, for those occasions when, for whatever reason, the issue of a disclosure may take longer than normal the NCSC has published guidance for care provider. This is available on its website at www.carestandards.org.uk.

Charges Policy

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Government policy is on charges for health services. [125417]

Mr. Hutton: Treatment provided by the national health service is free at the point of delivery, except in cases where specific legislation has been passed allowing a charge to be made. The current services for which a charge can be made are:

prescriptions

dental services

the supply of optical appliances by the hospital eye service

treatment of private patients

treatment of overseas visitors

appliances such as wigs and fabric supports

The NHS can also charge for the provision of accommodation and services for private resident and non-resident patients.

In addition to the above, NHS hospitals can charge for certain patient services using income generation powers. However, a charge can only be made where the service is considered to be additional treatments over and above the normal service provision. Any item or

service that is considered to be an integral part of a patient's treatment by their clinician will remain free of charge.

Children's Hospices

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of children's hospices *(a)* within and *(b)* outside the NHS. [125693]

Dr. Ladyman: There are currently 28 children's hospices in England, all of which are run by voluntary organisations.

Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham of 3 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 477–78W, what arrangements are in place to ensure confidential and personal information not required by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health is destroyed or otherwise kept secure. [124868]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Guidance on the retention and disposal arrangements for Community Health Council (CHC) records, including secure handling of confidential records, was issued to CHCs on 17 June 2003. Based on the principles of this guidance, more detailed guidance has subsequently been issued locally.

Criminal Records Checks

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect of delays in handling checks by the Criminal Records Bureau on the NHS. [125557]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service has faced some minor problems when recruiting new staff—as a result of the operating difficulties at the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). We have agreed a number of arrangements with the CRB to expedite the clearance of disclosure applications for NHS staff. The performance of the CRB has now greatly improved. In the week ending 5 July, the CRB issued 95 per cent., of standard disclosures within two weeks and 94 per cent. of enhanced disclosures within four weeks, against a service standard of 90 per cent. in each case. These arrangements and the CRB's improved performance has enabled the NHS to manage delays at the CRB without any significant adverse effect on patient services.

Deep Vein Thrombosis

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice his Department gives to reduce the risk of deep vein thrombosis in children. [124701]

Dr. Ladyman: Advice has been issued for groups of people at risk of developing deep vein thrombosis during air travel, where freedom of movement may be restricted for periods of time. Risk increases with age and with the presence of various health and life style factors. These are described on the Departments website at: http://www.doh.gov.uk/dvt/. Advice is also available by phoning NHS Direct. Children are not at risk of developing deep vein thrombosis unless there is a pre-existing medical condition or history which predisposes them to develop this condition. In this event, advice on how to minimise the risk will be provided by the clinical staff responsible for the child's care.

Dentists

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are taken to recoup the value of NHS-funded equipment from those dentists who choose to go private. [125769]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* General dental service (GDS) dentists are paid fees which cover both their income and expenses. The expense element of the fees covers the cost of the equipment as it is used. The equipment is owned by the dentist. Most dentists who do private work also continue to do GDS work.

Dentists may also qualify for special capital grants payments through incentive schemes which operate from time to time. Conditions for such schemes have generally included a requirement to maintain or increase national health service commitment and a term allowing recovery of payments, if these requirements are not complied with.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS registered dentists are working within the London borough of Wandsworth. [126180]

Mr. Hutton: The number of national health service dentists within the Wandsworth Primary Care Trust in the general dental service (GDS), salaried service of the GDS, community and hospital dental services at 30 September 2002 are shown in the table.

NHS Dental Services: Number of Dentists at 30 September 2002

	Wandsworth PCT
General dental service (GDS)[1]	130
Salaried service of the GDS	4
Community dental service	26
Hospital dental service	18

[1] GDS covers Principals on the Health Authority list, Assistants and Vocational Dental Practitioners.

Eating Disorders

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the new specialist services set up to treat patients with anorexia as a result of the report by the Royal College of Psychiatrists on eating disorders in 1998. [125089]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The report by the Royal College of Psychiatrists was published in 2001 and has contributed to two new pieces of work into this very serious disorder.

The National Development Group for Specialised Services, chaired by Professor Appleby, the National Director for Mental Health, has recently reviewed this issue and will report its findings in the autumn.

In addition, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence is preparing guidelines for the treatment of anorexia. These are expected to be issued towards the end of this year.

It is anticipated that proposals for service development will emerge from these three important pieces of work.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many deaths there were of patients suffering from anorexia, broken down by age, in each year since 1997; [125090]

(2) what the average cost was of treating a patient suffering from anorexia in each of the last three years; [125091]

(3) what the waiting time for patients with anorexia was to see a consultant in each primary care trust in each of the last three years. [125093]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Anorexia is a severe condition, mainly but not exclusively, affecting younger women, which can lead to death in about 15 per cent. of cases. It may affect as many as 1 per cent. of women and is a matter of considerable concern to the Department of Health.

A new group, the National Development Group for Specialised Services, chaired by the National Director for Mental Health, Professor Appleby, have recently reviewed this issue and will report their findings in the autumn.

In addition, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence is preparing guidelines for the treatment of anorexia and these are expected to be issued towards the end of this year. Unfortunately, Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data, which relate to diagnostic information for in-patients in national health service hospitals who have finished their hospital episodes under the care of a consultant specialist, are not collected in a form that reliably permits breakdown of the statistics on deaths following admission to hospital by diagnostic category.

Treatment costs associated with the care of such patients are normally be spread across primary care as well as secondary specialised services and information about overall cost is not captured in a way that permits analysis by diagnostic category.

Furthermore, summary information about waiting times to see a consultant psychiatrist is collected, but this is not broken down by diagnostic category.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where specialist services treating patients with anorexia are based. [125096]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Anorexia is a severe condition, mainly but not exclusively affecting younger women, which can lead to death in as many as 15 per cent. of cases. It may affect as many as one per cent. of women, and is a matter of considerable concern to the Department of Health.

The most recent survey indicates that there are approximately 70 units in the national health service and the independent sector specialising in eating disorders, including anorexia.

There continues to be a bias in provision towards the south-east of the country, with the south-west and north-east of England, as well as Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland having the fewest services in proportion to their populations.

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In addition, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence is preparing guidelines for the treatment of anorexia. These are expected to be issued towards the end of this year.

Emergency Planning

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the capacity of primary care trusts to undertake their emergency planning roles. [122102]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health has not received any representations on the capacity of primary care trusts (PCTs) to undertake their emergency planning roles.

The review of major incident planning capacity carried out by the Department earlier this year revealed that PCTs have satisfactory emergency planning arrangements in place against eight set criteria: clarity, coherence, contingencies, collaboration, credibility, capability, communications and commitment.

The outcome of the review is now being used to develop a programme of work to further strengthen emergency planning in the national health service. This includes revised guidance, currently being developed by the Department, the Health Protection Agency and the NHS. The guidance will be issued shortly.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made with plans for a poster campaign advising what to do in the event of a chemical or biological attack; and if he will make a statement on other plans to inform the public *(a)* in preparation for and *(b)* in the event of a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear incident. [122101]

Mr. Hutton: Public communications on issues including health in preparation for and in the event of a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) incident are planned and co-ordinated in a cross-Government context. The Department of Health is working closely with the Home Office CBRN Resilience Team and Government Information and Communication Service (GIGS) in the Cabinet Office.Information about terrorism and sensible measures for emergencies are available on the Home Office terrorism website. Further details on chemical and biological deliberate releases are also available on the Department of Health and Health Protection Agency websites.

Information and advice to the public will be made available in the event of a discernible threat of a specific incident.

Endometriosis

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the incidence of endometriosis was in the Thames Valley Health Authority in the last year for which figures are available. [124908]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The incidence of endometriosis for 2001–02, the last year for which figures are available, for the Thames Valley Health Authority is shown in the table.

Primary Diagnosis (ICD10 N80) Endometriosis: Finished consultant episodes
Count of finished admission episodes by selected health authorities (HAs) of treatment. NHS Hospitals, 2001–02

Health authority of treatment	*Description*	*Total episodes*
QA7	Berkshire HA	161
QA8	Buckinghamshire HA	211
QCE	Oxfordshire HA	168
Total	Thames Valley [1]	540

[1] Thames Valley Strategic Health Authority was created in April 2002 by the merger of the three HAs quoted above.

Notes:
1. Admissions are defined as the first period of in-patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. Please note that admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.
2. Figures have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data (i.e. the data is ungrossed).
3. The primary diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health, England.

Epilepsy

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of misdiagnoses of epilepsy in England over the last three years. [125010]

Dr. Ladyman: We have not made an estimate of the number or proportion of people misdiagnosed with epilepsy in England over the last three years. However, recent reports from the Clinical Standards Advisory Group—"Services for Patients with Epilepsy" (2000) and the Chief Medical Officer—"On the State of the Public Health" (2001) showed that around 20 per cent. of people receiving inappropriate and unnecessary treatment. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is developing a clinical guideline for the diagnosis, management and treatment of epilepsy, which is due in June 2004 and which will help address any shortfalls in current practice.

Food Safety

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Food Standards Agency's strategy for ensuring food safety through the testing of food samples at public analyst laboratories; [123609]

(2) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the numbers of *(a)* tests of food samples and *(b)* public analyst laboratories. [123610]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It is the responsibility of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to monitor the food sampling carried out under the Food Safety Act 1990 by local authorities. I am aware that the FSA has raised its concerns about the general decline in food sampling and the wide variation in sampling levels between authorities. Given the importance of food sampling and analyses as part of a local authority food law enforcement service, I am pleased to note that the FSA is taking forward a number of initiatives in close liaison with local authorities and the Association of Public Analysts to address these concerns and to ensure that food sampling contributes effectively to consumer protection. Initiatives include:

Working with Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services and the Association of Public Analysts to develop better coordination and targeting of UK food sampling activity;

Auditing local authorities with low levels of sampling activity and requiring remedial action plans;

A specific audit programme focused on sampling arrangements including visits to Public Analyst and Health Protection Agency laboratories to help identify key actions necessary to address sampling activity;

Developing a UK Samples Database to help local authorities and the Agency target sampling programmes effectively; and

New guidance on food sampling for local authority enforcement officers.

I am aware that the Association of Public Analysts has expressed concerns about the impact that declining sampling levels have had on the viability of certain individual public analyst laboratories. Relevant initiatives being taken forward by the FSA to improve local authority food sampling activity are being carried out in close liaison with the Association of Public Analysts to help ensure appropriate laboratory capacity and analytical capabilities.

A paper on food sampling was discussed by the FSA Board at an open meeting on 10 July 2003 at Kensington Town Hall.

Food Supplements

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implications of the Food Supplements Directive for the availability of food supplements. [123617]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It is not yet possible to determine the true impact of the Directive on the future continued availability of products currently on the United Kingdom market, which will depend on future developments on maximum limits and lists of permitted nutrients and nutrient sources. The Government recognise that some products will be lost from the UK market from 1 August 2005 because of restrictions on nutrient sources which will apply from that date.

Article 5 of Directive 2002/46/EC on Food Supplements sets out principles for setting European Union maximum limits for vitamins and minerals in food supplements, although no specific figures have yet been set. Discussion on maximum limits at EU level will follow publication of advice from the European Food Safety Authority. We do not expect the European Commission to issue its proposal on maximum limits before the end of this year.

Foundation Hospitals

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what way foundation hospitals in England will be accountable to their patients from Wales. [123848]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 July 2003]:* Subject to meeting minimum legislative requirements, as set out in the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill, national health service foundation trusts will have flexibility to ensure local accountability. A NHS foundation trust would be able to define its membership community to include patients in Wales and would have the flexibility to provide a place on the Board of Governors for Welsh commissioners if that was appropriate.

General Practitioners

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners there are per head of population in England. [126069]

Mr. Hutton: The number of all general medical practitioners, all practitioners per head of population and all practitioners per 100,000 population in England as at 30 September 2002 is shown in the table.

All General Medical Practitioners[1] in England, as at 30 September 2002

England	*Numbers (headcount)*
All Practitioners[1]	32,292
All Practitioners per head of population	0.0007
All Practitioners per100,000 population	65.4

[1] All Practitioners includes CMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs, PMS Salaried GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (para 52 SFA), PMS Other and GP Retainers.

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

Government Actuary's Department (GAD) 2001 based resident population projections for mid year 2002.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies for general practitioners there are in the London borough of Wandsworth. [126179]

Mr. Hutton: There are 6.5 general practitioner vacancies in Wandsworth.

Homeless People

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of homeless people are registered with general practitioners. [125852]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* This information is not held or collected centrally—data on the number of homeless people do not include information on how many are registered with a general practitioner and general practice registration data do not identify those who are homeless.

Infant Infection

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about measures being taken to reduce the risk of babies being infected by Group B streptococcus; and if he will make a statement. [123057]

Dr. Ladyman: The UK National Screening Committee (NSC) makes recommendations to Ministers on all aspects of screening programmes. The NSC has advised that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that routine screening of all pregnant women in the United Kingdom and treating those carrying Group B Streptococcus with intravenous antibiotics during labour would be beneficial. The NSC has however commissioned an assessment of the existing evidence on screening against the criteria used to assess potential screening programmes. At the adjournment debate on this issue on 9 July 2003, Ministers asked the NSC to review the position thoroughly as quickly as possible and to consider recommendations at its meeting in December 2003.

Infectious Patients

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 24 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 721W, on infectious patients, if he will publish the results of the risk assessments undertaken in 2000. [124553]

Miss Melanie Johnson: These risk assessments were not collected centrally. Chief executives in acute national health service trusts were required to:

undertake a risk assessment to determine appropriate provision of isolation facilities within the trust; and

agree the level and type of provision with the regional office.

IT Procurement

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons the Shires Acute and Community Hospital EPR Procurement Programme was terminated. [120372]

Mr. Hutton: The Shires Electronic Patient Records (EPR) procurement did not proceed to final award of contract primarily on grounds of affordability. This was a local procurement that decided it did not have sufficient funds to cover the costs and contract for the first three years.

The National Programme for Information Technology (NpfIT) in the national health service is currently procuring an integrated care records service, which will provide, as part of its first phase, the functionality that the Shires EPR would have delivered. The national procurement approach will provide better value for money for taxpayers.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on IT procurement policy for the NHS; [123504]

(2) if he will make a statement on IT procurement policy in *(a)* the south-west region and *(b)* the Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Strategic Health Authority area; [123505]

(3) what role Integrated Line Records Services will play within future IT procurement policy. [123506]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 4 July 2003]:* The approach to procurement for the National Programme for Information Technology (NPfIT) in the national health service was published in January 2003 and can be found at www.doh.gov.uk/ipu/whatnew/procapp.pdf

NPfIT is currently managing a national procurement for an integrated care records service (ICRS). An Official Journal of the European Community (OJEC)

contract notice was issued on 31 January 2003 and we are now evaluating pre-qualified bidders responses before proceeding to shortlist. It is proceeding as rapidly as good practice allows.

Phase 1 of ICRS to December 2004 will provide clinicians, whether they are in primary, community or secondary care settings, with the capability to email, browse internet/intranet sites, view basic clinical information relating to their patients (demographics), electronically transfer limited clinical correspondence, laboratory reports and some radiology results. New ICRS solutions will also provide integrated support for national service framework data collection.

Procurement in the South West will be part of national arrangements designed to minimise risk and maximise value for money in the NHS by the award of contracts to local service providers. For the provision of IT services by local service providers, England will be grouped into five geographic clusters based upon the pairing of geographically adjoining Government Office regions and will each incorporate a number of strategic health authorities (SHAs).

There will be a total of five contracts awarded and a maximum of five local service providers covering: London; North East, Yorkshire and Humberside; South East and South West; East of England and East Midlands; West Midlands and North West. The first two contracts will be awarded by the end of October 2003 to London and North East, Yorkshire and Humberside.

Each SHA will have a relationship with a dedicated local service provider to provide a range of applications, systems and services and will be responsible for integrating or replacing the computer systems needed to support the clinical applications being delivered by the NPfIT. Each local service provider will also have responsibility for the management of legacy systems as part of their overall remit.

Knee and Hip Replacements

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 1 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 232W, on knee and hip joints, what auditing procedures are in place for charges made to NHS and private patients for the parts used in knee and hip joint replacement operations. [124879]

Mr. Hutton: All national health service trusts are required to have in place financial management and audit arrangements. These aim to ensure that private patients are correctly charged for the goods and services they receive, including prostheses used in hip and knee replacements. NHS patients are not charged for their treatment or for the prostheses.

Midwives

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average age of midwives was in each year since 1990. [124255]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): average age of qualified midwives in England as at 30 September for specified years

Headcount

	Average age of qualified midwives[1]
1990	38
1991[2]	—
1992[2]	—
1993[2]	—
1994	38
1995	39
1996	39
1997	39
1998	40
1999	40
2000	41
2001	41
2002	41

[1] Average ages are rounded to the nearest year.
[2] For 1991 to 1993, the age of midwives is known only within bands.
Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

MRI Scanners

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the recommended minimum number of radiographers is to each MRI scanner. [125149]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* The Department of Health has not issued a recommendation on the minimum number of radiographers required for each mirror resonance imaging scanner. Staffing levels for all clinical and medical staff groups are determined locally, consistent with trust requirements, professional recommendations and other local healthcare needs.

Neurology Nurse Specialists

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the need for neurology nurse specialists in the hospital trust areas covering Portsmouth; what the current staffing requirement is for each of the trusts; what the current level of staffing is of each; what plans he has to make changes to staffing levels; and if he will make a statement. [124857]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not collected centrally. The non-medical workforce census collects information annually on the number of nurses employed in the national health service as at 30 September each year but cannot distinguish those who are specialist neurological nurses.

Workforce is recognised as key to the successful delivery of the NHS Plan and the national service frameworks. The long term conditions care group workforce team (LTC CGWT) has been set up to support workforce development in the fields of diabetes, renal and long term conditions. The LTC CGWT addresses workforce planning for neurological nurses. Its aim is to help deliver a multidisciplinary and

integrated health and social care workforce to support service improvement. Membership of the LTC CGWT includes representatives of the Neurological Alliance and the North West Clinical Neuroscience Partnership.

NHS Professionals

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many agency staff of all grades NHS Professionals has employed to carry out its central functions and administration in each month; and at what cost; [124303]

(2) what the *(a)* start up and *(b)* quarterly costs of NHS Professionals have been since its inception; how many staff have been employed; and at what cost; [124304]

(3) which NHS trusts NHS Professionals has had contracts with in each month since its inception; when those contracts were entered into; when they ended; and what their value was; [124305]

(4) how many agency staff NHS Professionals has deployed in each month since its inception; what the cost was to NHS Professionals of deploying staff; and what the income received from NHS trusts was; [124306]

(5) how many and what grades of staff have been retained for agency work by NHS Professionals in each month since its inception. [124307]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested on the staffing of NHS Professionals is not collected centrally, but is available from individual NHS Professionals service providers.

NHS Professionals was allocated £7 million to support the start up of pilot sites. A further £24 million has been invested in 2002–03 to support roll out and we will continue to invest in NHS Professionals to ensure implementation. We have also earmarked up to £35 million to support the establishment of the NHS Professionals Special Health Authority by the end of this year, and continuing development in 2004–05. Thereafter, the special health authority should operate on a self-financing basis delivering more cost effective temporary staff to the national health service.

The NHS trusts which are using NHS Professionals are shown in the following list. Information on contracts and staffing is not available centrally.

NHS trusts which host NHS Professionals include the expenditure for deploying agency staff in their accounts and financial returns. The trusts are St. Mary's NHS Trust Paddington, Barking, Having and Redbridge NHS Trust, West Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust, John Radcliffe NHS Trust, East and North Herts NHS Trust and North Bristol NHS Trust. NHS trusts which utilise the services of "NHS Professionals" are recharged for these services and will also include these payments in their own accounts and financial returns.

There are 50,000 staff registered with NHS Professionals. Information on grades of staff is not available.

NHS Trusts using NHS Professionals

Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust
Barking Havering and Redbridge NHS Trust
Bath and NE Somerset PCT, Bath
Cherwell Vale PCT, Oxfordshire
Christie Hospital NHS Trust, Manchester
City Hospital Sunderland NHS Trust
Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust, Stourbridge
East and North Herts NHS Trust, Stevenage
East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust
Epping Forest PCT
George Eliot NHS Trust, Nuneaton
Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust
Harlow PCT
Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust, Newport
Lancashire Care NHS Trust, Preston
Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, Leicester
Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust, Wakefield
North Bristol NHS Trust, Bristol
North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust
North East Oxfordshire PCT
North Essex Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust
North Mersey Community NHS Trust
North Middlesex University Hospital
Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust
Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust, Oxford
Oxford City PCT
Oxford Learning Disability NHS Trust
Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust
Oxfordshire Mental Healthcare NHS Trust
Penine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, Oldham
Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust, Harlow
Royal Liverpool Children's NHS Trust
Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Trust
Royston, Buntingford and Bishops Stortford PCT
Salford Royal Hospitals NHS Trust
Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
South East Oxfordshire PCT
South Leeds PCT
South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust
South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust, Middlesbrough
South West Oxfordshire PCT
South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust
St. Helens and Knowsley Hospitals NHS Trust
St. Marys NHS Trust, London
Stockport NHS Trust
United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust
University College London Hospitals NHS Trust
University Hospital, Nottingham NHS Trust
Uttlesford PCT, Essex
Walsall PCT
Walton Neurology and Neurosurgery NHS Trust, Liverpool
West Middlesex University Hospitals NHS Trust
Whipps Cross University Hospital NHS Trust
Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
Worcestershire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust

NHS Services (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the results of the NHS GP survey in Gloucestershire. [121878]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Two areas, acute and primary care, were surveyed as part of the National 2002 Patient Survey Programme. The results have been disseminated on a strategic health authority (SHA) basis. This will allow for the cross-comparison of both the acute and the primary care data for local benchmarking purposes. The approach enables SHAs to maintain an overview of how results are formulated into local follow-up plans.

Information on the results of the NHS GP Survey in Gloucestershire is available from the Chief Executive of the Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire strategic health authority.

NHS Staff Absence

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the absence rates in the NHS were in days per employee per year in *(a)* England and *(b)* each region in each year since 1997. [125293]

Mr. Hutton: Figures for sickness absence in England were not collected by the Department of Health between 1997 and 1999. The table shows the figures published for sickness absence in England and its regions and covers the period from 1999 to 2001. Figures for 2002 will be published in the near future.

We do not collect or produce information for numbers of days lost per employee, but publish the figures as a percentage lost of the time they should have been available for work. General practitioners and their staff are not included in these figures as we do not collect this information.

Percentage

	1999	*2000*	*2001*
England	4.9	4.7	4.8
Regions			
Eastern	4.7	4.8	4.8
London	4.4	4.0	4.2
North West	5.5	5.1	5.0
Northern and Yorkshire	4.9	4.9	4.8
South East	4.4	4.1	4.4
South West	5.0	4.8	4.8
Trent	4.9	5.0	5.3
West Midlands	5.3	5.0	5.0

Nursing Homes (Wandsworth)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* private and *(b)* public residential nursing homes are registered in the London borough of Wandsworth. [126178]

Dr. Ladyman: At 31 March 2001, there were 58 registered independent general and mental nursing homes in Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority. There are no registered public sector nursing care homes. Separate figures are not available for Wandsworth.

Obesity

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of treating obesity related health problems in the last five years. [125142]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Figures for the cost to the national health service of treating obesity related health problems in the last five years are not available. However, the National Audit Office (NAO) report, "Tackling Obesity in England", published in February 2001, estimated that the direct cost to the NHS of treating obesity in 1998 was £9.4 million. The NAO also estimated that treating the consequences of obesity cost the NHS approximately£469.9 million for 1998.

Overseas Patients

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with which countries the UK has reciprocal arrangements for free medical treatment. [126014]

Mr. Hutton: The healthcare co-ordination arrangements contained in Regulations (EEC) 1408/71 and 574/72 apply in all the member states of the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland. The United Kingdom also has bilateral healthcare arrangements with more than 30 non-EEA countries and territories.

A fundamental principle underlying all the arrangements is that emergency treatment is provided under the state healthcare scheme to entitled visitors on the same terms as it is available to insured residents of the host country. Most countries and territories make some charges for some services.

Overseas Recruitment

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to recruit trained *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses from the Indian sub-continent to Britain. [124629]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health has agreed with the Indian Ministry of Health that the National Health Service can recruit healthcare professionals from particular states in India in compliance with the Department's International Code of Practice. A centrally managed campaign is already under way and doctors and nurses have been successfully recruited.

Doctors and nurses from India can find out more on: www.doh.gov.uk/international-recruitment.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of the NHS recruitment seminars held in May and June in *(a)* Austria, *(b)* Germany and *(c)* Italy; and how many applications have been received as a consequence of these seminars. [125951]

Mr. Hutton: The cost of the venues for the recruitment seminars that were held in Austria in May was £7,587 and the cost of the venues for the Italian seminars, held in June, was £6,[illegible]98. The recruitment seminars in Germany in May were held in Foreign and Commonwealth buildings and therefore only incurred minimal catering costs. The Department of Health has received 181 new applications from doctors, as a result of these seminars.

Plastic Surgery

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what regulations apply to doctors who carry out plastic surgery procedures; and if he will make a statement. [125739]

Mr. Hutton: All doctors who describe themselves as medical practitioners must be registered with the General Medical Council (GMC). To become a consultant in plastic surgery in the national health service, a doctor must have a Certificate of Completion of Specialist Training in the specialty.

In the private healthcare sector, regulation by the National Care Standards Commission requires surgeons carrying out cosmetic surgery to be registered with the GMC. Those beginning to practise in the private sector after 1 April 2002 are required to be on the specialist register. Plastic surgeons who were already practising in the private sector at the time the new legislation came into force are allowed to continue practising, provided that they meet other stringent standards in qualification and training.

Primary Care Trusts

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many appointees to primary care trust boards have met the disability criteria. [124624]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are currently 294 chairs of primary care trusts and 1,624 non-executive board members. Eight of the chairs and 73 of the non-executive board members are disabled.

Purley Hospital

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his Answer of 19 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 174–75W, on Purley Hospital, what his definition of the Croydon South locality is; and what the maximum population is that the new hospital will serve. [124907]

Mr. Hutton: The proposed new Purley Hospital is primarily focused on the south of Croydon, geographically defined by the electoral wards of Kenley, Purley, Coulsdon West, Coulsdon East, Sanderstead and Chroam. In practice, some planned services will serve a slightly larger population and some a smaller population dependent on the service.

Salt

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has commissioned on the savings to the NHS which might follow from a reduction in the average adult intake of salt to no more than six grams per day; and if he will make a statement. [122804]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Population average salt intake in the United Kingdom is currently around 9g per day. Previous studies have suggested that a reduction in salt intake from 9g to 6g per day would reduce diastolic pressure in the region of 2mm Hg.

The recently published Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) report on Salt and Health (2003) states that, "On a population basis it has been estimated that a reduction of 2mm Hg in diastolic blood pressure would result in 15 per cent. reduction in risk of stroke and transient ischaemic heart attacks and a 6 per cent. reduction in risk of coronary heart disease (Cook et al 1995). McPherson et al (2002) have estimated that 6 per cent. of deaths from coronary heart disease could be avoided if the numbers of people with high blood pressure were reduced by 50 per cent.".

The Department has not calculated the impact of salt reduction on national health service costs. Identifying savings attributable solely to a single intervention such as salt reduction would be extremely difficult. However, the benefits to health are clear, and based on the estimates from the SACN report, there could be substantial cost benefit to the NHS.

Smoking

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the proportion of children and teenagers who smoke. [121353]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The 1998 White Paper "Smoking Kills" set a target to reduce smoking among 11 to 15-year-olds from 13 per cent. in 1996 to 9 per cent. by 2010 with a fall to 11 per cent. by 2005.

Among 11 to 15-year-olds, smoking prevalence has remained unchanged since 2000 at ten per cent. and we are on course to meet our target for reducing smoking.

The information requested is shown in the tables.

Prevalence of regular cigarette smoking among secondary school pupils aged 11 to 15, by gender
England, 1996 to 2002

Percentages

	1996	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Boys	11	9	8	9	8	9
Girls	15	12	10	12	11	11
All pupils	13	11	9	10	10	10

Notes:
1. Regular smokers are those who smoke at least one cigarette a week, on average.

Source:
The Department of Health Statistical Press Notice "Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2002: Provisional Results" http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/spnmar03-smoking.htm

Prevalence of smoking cigarettes among adults, aged 16–19 and gender, England 1996–2001

Percentages

	[1]*1996*	[1]*1998*	[2]*1998*	[2]*2000*	[2]*2001*
Men	25	30	30	30	24
Women	32	33	33	28	31
All Persons	29	31	31	30	28

[1] Unweighted
[2] Weighted

Notes:
1. Up until 2000, data on the prevalence on smoking from the General Household Survey were only available every two years.
2. Data for 1998 onwards were weighted to compensate for under-representation of people in some groups: earlier figures were based on unweighted data, and are not therefore directly comparable.
3. Respondents who answered "yes" to the question "Do you smoke cigarettes at all nowadays?"

Source:
Office for National Statistics: General Household Survey 2001, published as 'Living in Britain: Results from the 2001 General Household Survey'. Available from the internet at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/lib2001/index.html.

Strategic Health Authority Debt

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of indebtedness of each strategic health authority was in the last year for which figures are available; what assistance the Government is providing to meet *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue expenditure relating to those debts; and what assessment he has made of the effects of historic indebtedness on service delivery in each authority. [124867]

Mr. Hutton: Strategic health authorities were established in 2002–03. Information from the individual audited accounts of these bodies will be available locally in September and centrally in autumn 2003.

Tooth Decay

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 355W, on tooth decay, to what extent Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust have achieved *(a)* Target 1 and *(b)* Target 2. [124869]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The two national targets for tooth decay in children aged five years are:

a reduction in the average number of decayed, missing and filled teeth to 1.0 teeth by 2003; and

an increase in the proportion of children with no experience of cavities to 70 per cent. by 2003.

The survey conducted by the British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry in 2001–02 showed that the average number of decayed, missing and filled teeth for five-year-old children in Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust was 1.32. The percentage of children with no experience of cavities was 62.7 per cent.

Waiting Lists

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been removed from NHS waiting lists in each of the past three years. [116879]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the number of patients removed from the elective inpatient waiting list. Patients may be removed from waiting lists for a number of reasons such as the patient already having been admitted as an emergency for the same condition, the patient no longer requires the treatment, or the patient has died.

Removals from the elective inpatient waiting list: England

	Removals
2000–01	613,931
2001–02	594,666
2002–03	600,759

Source:
Department of Health form KH06

Xenotransplantation

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the review commissioned by UKXIRA from Professor Sheila McLean into xenotransplantation; and if he will make a statement. [125181]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department of Health commissioned a series of three reviews on different aspects of xenotransplantation on behalf of the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority (UKXIRA) between 1999 and 2001. The first two—on infection and on physiology—were published 2001 and 2002. A third review, on the legal and ethical aspects of xenotransplantation, was commissioned from Professor Sheila McLean of the University of Glasgow, who was also a member of the UKXIRA from 1997 to 2002.

The UKXIRA has considered the review and concluded that it made some useful discussion points and that the summary of the research papers should be placed on the UKXIRA website. While there are no plans to publish Professor McLean's whole review as a Department of Health/UKXIRA document, Professor McLean is free to publish it if she wishes.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on xenotransplantation. [125281]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority was established in 1997 to advise the Government on the acceptability of specific applications to undertake xenotransplantation procedures (the transplantation of live cells, tissues and organs from a non-human source into a human). It also acts as a focal point for xenotransplantation issues. Organisations undertaking research into xenotransplantation in the United Kingdom are required to comply with all relevant legislation. No clinical trials involving humans have yet been approved in the UK and currently no relevant organ transplant research is licensed in the UK under the Animals (Science Procedures) Act 1986.

CABINET OFFICE

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 155W, on asbestos, if he will list the buildings which have been identified as containing asbestos. [122987]

Mr. Alexander: Asbestos is present in a number of historic Cabinet Office buildings going back many years to a time when asbestos was commonly used in the building profession. It is managed in accordance with the current regulations and we are on target to meet the requirements of the "Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002" when they come fully into force next year. The buildings identified as containing asbestos are:

36 and 70 Whitehall

2 Little Smith Street

Downing Street

Admiralty House

CMPS Residential Training Centre at Sunningdale.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Office since 29 October 2002. [126612]

Mr. Alexander: Since 29 October 2002 I have made 24 written ministerial statements to Parliament.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefits Payments

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the oral answer from the Minister for Work, of 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 738, if he will list the *(a)* objectives referred to by the Minister and *(b)* time by which each such objective is to be met. [125385]

Mr. Pond *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* The Department has a published Public Service Agreement that by 2005, 85 per cent. of customers will have their benefits paid by Direct Payment. The successful introduction of Universal banking services on 1 April 2003 has ensured that customers will continue to be able to access their money at the Post Office if they wish—just as they do now.

Benefits/Tax Credits

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions with reference to the total United Kingdom benefit and tax credit expenditure which forms the last line of Table 1: Benefit and Tax Credit expenditure by DWP objective (nominal terms) in the Benefit Expenditure Tables found at http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd4/expenditure.htm, if he will list the types of tax credit, benefits payment and other components which comprise the quoted figures; for each type of tax credit, benefit payment and other component, whether, according to the accounting methods employed in the 2003 Budget, they are classified as negative tax revenues, Government spending or a combination of the two; and for each tax credit, benefit payment and other component, what amount of tax was refunded and Government spending was incurred for each year since 2001–02 to the latest year for which figures are projected. [121328]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General on 3 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 378–79W.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the policy of the Child Support Agency is in respect of making applications for reciprocal enforcement of maintenance orders against absent parents resident overseas; and how many such applications the CSA has made in each of the last five years. [125671]

Mr. Pond: The Department for Constitutional Affairs is responsible for administering reciprocal enforcement of maintenance orders for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Within Scotland, this function is performed by the Scottish Executive.

The Child Support Agency does not have jurisdiction over cases where the non-resident parent is habitually resident outside the UK, except if he or she is employed by a British-based employer.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his oral answer of 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 733, when he plans to make a further report on the performance of the Child Support Agency. [125365]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I stated on 7 July 2003 during oral questions, *Official Report*, column 733, that I would shortly report to the House on progress in implementation of the new child support scheme. I have today placed that report in the Library.

Disability Living Allowance

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money was claimed in disability living allowance in Scotland in 2002–03, broken down by local authority. [125555]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

Disability living allowance: estimated expenditure in Scotland in the financial year, April 2002 to March 2003, by local authority area

£ million

Local authority	*Expenditure*
Aberdeen City	25
Aberdeenshire	25
Angus	12
Argyll and Bute	10
The Scottish Borders	11
Clackmannanshire	9
West Dumbartonshire	19
Dumfries and Galloway	22
[Dundee City	24
East Ayrshire	21
East Dumbartonshire	12
East Lothian	13
East Renfrewshire	8
City of Edinburgh	53
Falkirk	23
Fife	54
Glasgow City	140
Highland	24
Inverclyde	16
Midlothian	14
Moray	8
North Ayrshire	23
North Lanarkshire	70
Orkney Islands	2
Perth and Kinross	13
Renfrewshire	31
Shetland Isles	2
South Ayrshire	17
South Lanarkshire	54
Stirling	13
West Lothian	27
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	3
Total Scotland	800

Notes:
1. Expenditure has been assigned to local authority areas by matching postcodes against the relevant Office of National Statistics postcode directory.
2. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.
3. Because of relatively small sample sizes at local authority level, the figures are subject to a greater margin of error than would be associated with national level expenditure estimates; all results are rounded to the nearest £1 million, but may not be accurate to this level.
4. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source:
Information and Analysis Directorate, GB estimated outturn expenditure for 2002–03 apportioned using local authority data from the DLA Quarterly Statistical Enquiry.

Entitlement Card

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions his Department has had with the Home Office about *(a)* the possible introduction of an entitlement card scheme, *(b)* the use to which such a card would be put on the matters for which he is responsible and *(c)* the costs and funding of the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [124918]

Mr. Pond: Along with other Government Departments, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has consulted with the Home Office in respect of the possible introduction of an entitlement card scheme. A very high-level consideration of impacts upon the Departments business, should the entitlement card scheme be introduced, has been made. Our initial considerations have focused upon the potential application of the National Insurance number (NINO) to the scheme, and to impacts upon our current and future business processes. However, at this stage, it is not possible to respond in any greater detail.

EU Committees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many officials in the Department serve on EU committees or working parties. [116093]

Mr. Pond: Membership of EU committees and working parties is not fixed, and depending on the subject matter under consideration, the most appropriate policy officials attend these meetings. 141 officials currently serve on 158 EU committees and working parties.

Of these, 82 officials serve on 116 Health and Safety groups, and 16 officials (serving 14 education committees and working parties) work for the Joint International Unit (Department for Education and Skills and Department for Work and Pensions), which, for administrative purposes, is located in the Department for Work and Pensions.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will estimate the savings his Department has made from the investigation of fraud in each of the last six years; [124499]

(2) if he will estimate the savings arising from the *(a)* National Benefit Fraud Hotline and *(b)* report-a-cheat-online claim forms in each of the last six years. [124502]

Mr. Pond: The investigation of fraud leads to savings in two ways. The detection of fraud already in the system prevents further losses in those cases and secondly our work to tackle fraud acts as a deterrent to prevent potential fraud happening in the first place. It is therefore not possible to provide an estimate of the total savings resulting from our anti-fraud work.

However, we know from our continuous measurement of the level of fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance that between 1997–98 and 2001–02 we had achieved a reduction of 24 per cent. We are committed to achieving our target of a 33 per cent. reduction for working age customers by 2004, and a 50 per cent. reduction by 2006.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many calls have been made to the national benefit fraud hotline in each of the last six years; and how many have resulted in successful prosecutions. [124500]

Mr. Pond: The available information is in the table.

National benefit fraud hotline

April-March	*Number of calls received*	*Successful prosecutions*
1997–98	188,038	n/a[1]
1998–99	170,032	n/a[1]
1999–2000	162,067	335
2000–01	[2]208,201	492
2001–02	[2]205,999	703
2002–03	[2]159,290	706

[1] Full information on the number of successful prosecutions resulting from calls to the national benefit fraud hotline is available only from April 1999.

[2] Figures include calls received by the Call Centre Bureau, which since May 2000 has been contracted to answer calls outside normal working hours when the main hotline is closed.

Source:
National benefit fraud hotline and fraud information by sector.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost was of administering the *(a)* national benefit fraud hotline and *(b)* report-a-cheat-online claim form in each of the last six years. [124503]

Mr. Pond: The available information is in the table.

Cost of administering the national benefit fraud hotline and the 'report-a-cheat-online' claim form[1]

£

Year[2]	*Staffing*[3]	*Goods and services*	*Total*
2000–01	494,457	133,347	627,804
2001–02	529,026	556,974	1,086,000
2002–03	597,807	361,470	959,277

[1] The cost of administering the NBFH and report-a-cheat-online cannot be separated.

[2] Cost figures are not available prior to 2000–01.

[3] Staffing costs are based on the employment of telephone operators and the admin support needed to assist the operation.

Source:
National benefit fraud hotline (NBFH)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases of benefit fraud have been detected in each of the last six years; and how many resulted in successful prosecution. [124505]

Mr. Pond: The number of cases of benefit fraud detected is not available. The number of cases resulting in a successful prosecution, caution or administrative penalty is in the table.

Fraud investigations

	Successful prosecutions		*Cautions and administrative penalties as an alternative to prosecution*		
	DWP	*Local authorities*	*DWP*	*Local authorities*	*Total*
1997–98	11,380	700	—	—	12,080
1998–99	9,970	800	—	—	10,770
1999–2000	9,130	860	11,030	390	21,410
2000–01	11,400	1,100	15,560	550	28,610
2001–02	11,180	1,700	13,550	2,600	29,030
2002–03	9,270	2,500	14,270	6,000	32,040

Notes:

1. Administrative penalties, as an alternative to prosecution, were introduced by the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act (1997) with effect from December 1998. Cautions were made available to local authorities as a sanction from the start of 2001–02.
2. Figures for financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01 are taken from local authority management information returns. It is possible that there could be some double counting with DWP data if there were cases which involved a joint prosecution.
3. Management information data for financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01 is not available for all local authorities. The total for Great Britain includes estimates for local authorities that have not responded. These estimates are based on historical and regional data. This type of estimate is standard practice in reporting totals where there have been non-respondents. The figures for financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01 have been rounded to two significant figures.
4. Information for 2001–02 is from a count of prosecutions and sanctions completed by all local authorities; this data is collected from local authority subsidy returns. Subsidy data may differ from management information data (shown for financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01) at local authority level; however, analysis shows a high level of consistency between the two data sources at national level.
5. The DWP figures are from the Fraud Information By Sector database, which shows completed cases commenced in the relevant period. Due to the elapsed time between commencement of an investigation and completion of a prosecution there are cases that are inserted into previously completed data for earlier periods. All DWP totals are therefore correct at the time when quoted but subject to adjustment at a later date.
6. In accordance with National Statistics Guidelines all DWP figures are rounded to the nearest 10. Due to rounding process totals may not agree.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 4 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 522–23W, on fraud (Scotland), by what means his Department tracks trends in council tax benefit fraud *(a)* at national and *(b)* local authority level. [124858]

Mr. Pond: The measurement of fraud and error is complex and expensive and as such it is concentrated on benefits with the highest expenditure and risk of loss, such as housing benefit. Information on the cost of fraud and error is not available for council tax benefit. However, the measures that we are taking to fight fraud and error in housing benefit will also serve to improve the accuracy of council tax benefit.

Homelessness

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what benefits are available to homeless families in priority need. [124685]

Mr. Pond: Homeless people, including homeless families in priority need, have access to the same benefits as anyone else, providing they meet the conditions of entitlement.

Jobseeker's Allowance

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money was claimed in jobseeker's allowance in Scotland in 2002–03, broken down by local authority. [125319]

Mr. Pond: Jobseeker's allowance gross benefit expenditure in Scotland for 2002–03 was £273,597,824.62. This figure is not available broken down by local authority area, but is available by district and local office, and this information has been placed in the Library.

Pension Credit Hotline

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) when information is being provided about the pension credit hotline to people who are likely to be eligible for the pension credit; [125403]

(2) what the number is of the pension credit hotline; and how many helpline operators there are; [125406]

(3) how many calls have been received by the pension credit hotline in each week since it first opened. [125407]

Malcolm Wicks: The Pension Service began in April 2003 to write to pensioner households to explain pension credit and to invite applications. The letters include the number of the freephone application line (0800 99 1234) and a separate textphone number (0800 169 0133). By June 2004, all pensioner households will have been contacted in this way. The two numbers will also be included in an advertising campaign scheduled to begin in September 2003. The application line will have around 1,500 whole-time equivalent staff when pension credit is implemented in October 2003. Information on the number of calls received is not available in the format requested. The number of calls received by the application line between 7 April 2003, when the line went live, and 30 June 2003 was 114,000.

Pension Payments

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how the Government will pay pensions after current pension books expire to pensioners who currently use their pension book to collect their pension at a Post Office and who do not nominate a bank account or a Post Office Card Account into which they wish their pension to be paid. [125380]

Mr. Pond *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* Customers will be supplied with information that clearly sets out their account options. This will enable them to choose the account which best meets their needs and circumstances. An alternative method of payment will be available for those who are genuinely unable to open or operate any type of bank account.

Pensioner Income

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what forecasts his Department has made of average pensioner income levels over the next five years. [119234]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department for Work and Pensions does not make forecasts of future pensioner incomes. However to project future expenditure on Pension Credit it was assumed that pensioner income brought to account would increase in line with earnings.

The Pensioner Income Series 2000–01 shows that the average net income before housing costs of pensioner couples in 2000–01 was 301 and the average income of single pensioners was £160 per week (amounts shown in 2000–01 price terms).

The average net income of pensioners grew by around 23 per cent. in real terms between 1994–05 and 2001–02.

Pensions

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when and how people whose retirement pensions are paid monthly into their bank accounts have been informed of the availability of weekly payment. [125286]

Mr. Pond: The Department has no plans to contact customers who currently receive four-weekly payments into a bank or building society account. Customers will only be contacted if they are directly affected by the change to Direct Payment. Therefore for those pensioners currently paid four weekly directly into their account, payment frequency will remain the same. Any pensioners from this group, who wish to change to weekly payments, will need to contact the Pension Service to request this.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 23 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 630W on pensions, what plans he has to update the figures quoted by the right hon. Member of Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) on 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 210W. [126391]

Malcolm Wicks: Departmental analysts are currently working on processing and investigating NIRS2 data covering the financial years up to 2000–01. It is intended that this data will be published in the Autumn.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioner households there are in each region of Great Britain. [125949]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested. However, the information in the table shows the number of households in receipt of a winter fuel payment containing a person of state pension age (60 for women, 65 for men) in each government office region of Great Britain.

Government office region	*Households in receipt of a winter fuel payment containing a person of state pension age*
North East	300,000
North West	900,000
Yorkshire and the Number	700,000
East Midlands	500,000
West Midlands	700,000
East of England	700,000
London	800,000
South East	1,100,000
South West	700,000
Wales	400,000
Scotland	600,000
Total	7,400,000

Note:
1. Figures include people in residential care
2. Numbers of pensioner households are rounded to the nearest 100,000

Source:
Information taken from the winter fuel payment 2002/03 administrative database

Policy Simulation Model

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the use of the policy simulation model by his Department; and if he will place its specifications in the Library. [125950]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department for Work and Pension's Policy Simulation Model is a static microsimulation model used by analysts within the department to estimate the budgetary and distributional impacts of a range of hypothetical and actual policy changes. The model is similar in purpose and functionality to those maintained by HM Treasury (IGOTM), the Institute for Fiscal Studies (TAXBEN) and the Cambridge Microsimulation Unit (POLIMOD). An overview of the model has been placed in the Library.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps the Department has taken to publicise its Public Service Agreement targets; and at what cost to public funds. [114450]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department for Work and Pensions reports progress against Public Service Agreement targets in routine publications, such as the annual Departmental Report and Autumn Performance Report. These are also available to the public on the Department's website (www.dwp.gov.uk.) and to staff via the intranet. These incur no significant additional cost to public funds.

SchlumbergerSema

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the levels of performance against the key performance targets in respect of SchlumbergerSema in *(a)* March, *(b)* April and *(c)* May 2003; whether a financial penalty has been imposed for failure to meet targets in these months; and if he will make a statement. [122466]

Maria Eagle: A table showing the levels of achievement against 15 key performance targets in each of the three contract packages for March, April and May 2003, has been placed in the Library.

Service credits for failure to meet contractual service level targets have been applied as appropriate in each of those three months.

Social Fund

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his plans are to reform the Social Fund. [121123]

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to reform the Social Fund. [126262]

Mr. Pond: As my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirmed in his recent budget report, we are considering the case for further reform of the Social Fund.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his Answer of 8 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 764–65W, on stakeholder schemes, how many companies the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority has fined for non-compliance with the workplace access requirements for stakeholder pensions schemes; and what the average value was of those fines. [126390]

Malcolm Wicks: The Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra) regulates compliance with the Stakeholder Pensions workplace access requirements by responding to whistleblowers' reports and by using surveys targeted by region and business sector. When cases of non-compliance come to light, Opra focuses on working with the employer to rectify the situation rather than taking a merely punitive approach. Since the requirements came into force on 8 October 2001, Opra has received 440 reports concerning the stakeholder access requirements. To date, 427 of these cases have been closed, either because, as a result of Opra and the employer working together, full compliance was achieved, or because the employer proved to be exempt from the requirements. The remaining 13 cases are still under investigation by Opra.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what remit relating to sustainable development is required by his Department's *(a)* executive agencies, *(b)* advisory non-departmental bodies, *(c)* executive non-departmental bodies, *(d)* tribunals, *(e)* public corporations and *(f)* other bodies. [116672]

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on what responsibilities relating to sustainable development are *(a)* required of and *(b)* undertaken by his Department's (i) executive agencies, (ii) advisory non-departmental bodies, (iii) executive non-departmental bodies, (iv) tribunals, (v) public corporations and (vi) other bodies. [119127]

Malcolm Wicks: All DWP Executive Agencies and other associated bodies are required to follow the Department's Sustainable Development Policy Statement (which is on the dwp website dwp.gov.uk/sus-dev/documents/policy.pdf). A Sustainable Development Steering Group, comprised of senior officials from across the Department and its Executive Agencies, has the responsibility for ensuring that the policy statement is observed and that a positive contribution is made towards the Departments Sustainable Development Improvement Programme. This includes all the targets from the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many planning applications have been made to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department. [124810]

Maria Eagle: Since August 2001, when the current planning regulations on mobile telecommunications masts came into force, there have been three planning applications to site masts on the DWP estate.

There are currently 10 Mobile Telecommunications Masts on the DWP Estate. These were in place before August 2001.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Legislative Programme

Mr. Allen: To ask the Leader of the House if he will publish the list of Departments who have bid for Bills in the new session. [124978]

Mr. Hain: No. Government do not release papers, information or correspondence relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committees or pre-empt the content of the Queen's Speech.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Unmarried Couples (Legal Rights)

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what plans he has to extend property, benefit and pension rights to the bereaved partner in an unmarried co-habiting relationship following the death of their partner. [125973]

Mr. Lammy: On 30 June, my right Hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Industry and the Regions and the Deputy Minister for Women and Equality, published

'Civil Partnership—a framework for the legal recognition of same sex couples'. It sets out Government proposals for the establishment of civil partnership registration for same sex couples, while also making clear that it is not proposed to extend these arrangements to unmarried opposite sex couples.

The Civil Partnership consultation paper proposes to give same-sex civil partners the same rights as married couples in respect of the intestacy rules and of the Inheritance (Provision for Family and Dependants) Act 1975. The paper also sets out proposals relating to property and benefits rights. There are no proposals in relation to opposite-sex cohabiting couples, as they have the option of marriage available to them should they wish it.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what recent representations he has received on extending legal rights to unmarried couples. [125952]

Mr. Lammy: The Law Commission published a discussion paper on the property rights of homesharers in July 2002, entitled 'Home Sharers'. In addition, the Law Society has published draft proposals for the introduction of increased legal rights of cohabiting couples, entitled "Cohabitation—the case for clear law" also in July 2002.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs (1) what plans he has to extend legal rights to unmarried couples; [125970]

(2) what action he is taking to give property and pension rights to couples who choose not to marry. [125972]

Mr. Lammy: On 30 June, my right hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Industry and the Regions and the Deputy Minister for Women and Equality, published 'Civil Partnership—a framework for the legal recognition of same sex couples'. It sets out Government proposals for the establishment of civil partnership registration for same sex couples, while also making clear that it is not proposed to extend this arrangement to unmarried opposite sex couples.

However, in recognition of the extent of misunderstanding about the status of 'common law marriage', I am exploring, together with other relevant colleagues, how best to undertake an information campaign so that unmarried couples can be more fully and accurately informed about their position.

Civil Injuries Compensation

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what plans he has to extend eligibility for civil injuries compensation to the bereaved partner in an unmarried co-habiting relationship following the death of their partner. [125969]

Mr. Lammy: Under the Fatal Accidents Act 1976, an opposite sex cohabitant of a person who has died as a result of another person's negligence is entitled to claim for financial loss as a dependant if he or she had lived with the deceased partner for at least two years prior to the death. The Government's consultation paper "Civil Partnership: A framework for the legal recognition of same sex couples" proposes that same sex couples who register a partnership should be eligible to claim for financial loss and bereavement damages in the same way that spouses can.

The Law Commission in its report "Claims for Wrongful Death" has recommended that other same sex and opposite sex cohabitants who can show dependency should also be entitled to claim. The Commission has also recommended that same sex and opposite sex cohabitants who have lived together for at least two years prior to the death should be entitled to an award of bereavement damages. The Government is currently considering these proposals.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what action he is taking to extend eligibility for civil injuries compensation to the children of parents in an unmarried co-habiting relationship following the death of one of their parents. [125971]

Mr. Lammy: Under the Fatal Accidents Act 1976, any child of a deceased person where that person has died as a result of another person's negligence is entitled as a dependant to claim damages for any financial loss suffered. The Law Commission in its report "Claims for Wrongful Death" has recommended that children of the deceased should also be entitled to an award of bereavement damages. The Government is currently considering this proposal.

Entitlement Card

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what discussions his Department has had with the Home Office about the *(a)* possible introduction of an entitlement card scheme, *(b)* the use to which such a card would be put on the matters for which he is responsible and *(c)* the costs and funding of the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [126220]

Mr. Lammy: Work on the possible introduction of entitlement cards has involved significant liaison between the Home Office and the Department for Constitutional Affairs and other relevant departments.

Joint Guarantors

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will amend the Data Protection Act 1998 to make provision for individuals to be able to make informed decisions about the financial soundness of potential joint guarantors. [124495]

Mr. Lammy: We have no plans to do so. The Data Protection Act 1998 regulates the processing of information relating to individuals through a general framework of good handling rules known as the data protection principles. The Act confers no rights of access to third party personal data. Disclosures of such data may be made consistently with the Act, provided that they comply with the data protection principles or meet the terms of a "non-disclosure" exemption.

Legal Aid

Mr. Watts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what plans he has to conduct an investigation into abuse of the legal aid system. [125211]

Mr. Lammy: The Secretary of State and I are most concerned about possible abuses of the legal aid system. However we are confident that the Legal Services Commission (LSC) has strong controls and measures in place to prevent and investigate fraud and abuse of the legal aid system.

The LSC has established procedures for handling cases where allegations of fraudulent behaviour by suppliers, and clients seeking funding are made and for taking appropriate action where fraud or abuse is uncovered.

The reforms underpinned by the Access to Justice Act 1999 have significantly strengthened the control of fraud and abuse by suppliers. All suppliers who wish to provide publicly funded legal services are required to work to a contract and to comply with the LSC's quality standards. The LSC reorganised its Investigations Section in 2002–03 to reflect the fact that fraud control is increasingly achieved via contract management audits, which are the responsibility of the regional offices. Firm action has and is being taken on a number of firms where abuses have been uncovered, including the termination of contracts. The LSC is also working jointly with The Law Society and the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner to actively investigate recent evidence of abuse by way of giving out inducements to asylum seekers at ports of entry. LSC action includes carrying out special audits of firms and the investigation is still continuing.

The LSC is also committed to actively investigating where doubts arise about whether a funded client is financially eligible for funding. These investigations are conducted by the LSC's Special Investigations Unit, which also assists regional offices with the means assessment of applicants for funding whose financial positions are complex.

Private Offices

Mr. Flight: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what have been the running costs of Ministers' private offices in his Department and its predecessor in each year since 1997. [123115]

Mr. Lammy: Gross administration costs (formerly known as running costs) for the Ministers' private offices from 1997 to date are set out in the following table:

Administration costs for Ministers' private offices

£

	Cost
1997–98[1]	0
1998–99	1,055
1999–2000	1,257
2000–01	1,585
2001–02	1,620
2002–03[2]	2,001

[1] Data not readily available without incurring disproportionate cost.

[2] The increase in running costs between 2001–02 and 2002–03 is a result of the Machinery of Government changes and the consequent expansion of the Ministers' private offices to accommodate the additional areas of responsibility.

Queen's Counsel

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what process was in place to decide who was offered silk prior to the review of the system announced earlier this year; and if he will make a statement. [125200]

Mr. Leslie: The selection process for Queen's Counsel prior to the announcement of the review was as follows:

Application

Applications were made annually through an advertisement and through the departmental website. The advertisement has for many years usually appeared in early September, and the list of successful applicants was published the following Maundy Thursday.

Consultation

Much of the Queen's Counsel exercise was conducted by means of written consultation. Written views were automatically sought from the judiciary, specialist legal associations and other senior practitioners. Applicants were invited to nominate up to six names from the list of automatic consultees who were best placed to provide comments against the criteria. They were also requested to nominate a further six consultees of their own choosing.

Meetings were held with the Heads of Supreme Court Divisions; the judges in charge of the Commercial Court, the Administrative Court and the Technology and Construction Court; the Presiding Judges; Family Division Liaison Judges; Circuit Leaders and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Bar Council. Meetings were occasionally also held to clarify a consultee's views or, where a consultee has consulted others, the degree of consensus.

Sift

Following the consultation period, departmental officials conducted a sift of all applicants, to establish how far the evidence demonstrated that they met the criteria for appointment to the required standard. All marks and comments were given individual consideration. No single comment or mark could, in itself, cause an application to fail.

The sift was a three-stage process. First, departmental officials working independently of each other prepared a written assessment of the evidence. The second stage consisted of two panels, each comprising a senior official and a lay member. The panels reviewed the applications and classified them according to the strength of the evidence that the applicant met the criteria for appointment. The third stage was moderation by Legal and Judicial Services Group's most senior officials to ensure a consistent standard of decision making and recording.

The results were presented to the Lord Chancellor in the form of a long list. This list was divided into categories relating to circuit or practice type. It summarised the evidence on every applicant who appeared to meet the criteria to the required standard, dividing them into four groups according to the strength of the evidence. The long list also included the name of any other applicant whose fees were in the upper quartile for their particular practice type or circuit. The Lord Chancellor was provided with the detailed comments received for each applicant who appeared in

the long list. He was provided with the names of, and the full comments received on, all ethnic minority, female, and solicitor applicants and those who had a specialist practice on provincial circuits. He also received a separate note of those not included in the long list and a brief summary of the reasons. This material enabled the Lord Chancellor and those he consulted to check the validity of the decision to exclude any of the applicants in the above categories from the Long List.

Appointment

The Lord Chancellor personally considered the long list and additional detailed material. He did not confine his consideration to the long list alone and based his final recommendations on all the material available to him. Following his initial consideration, he held separate meetings to discuss the applications with the Law Officers and the heads of Supreme Court divisions and their senior judicial colleagues, who also received copies of the same material. The Lord Chancellor then decided which applicants to recommend to the Queen for appointment.

There was no limit to the numbers of new Queen's Counsel who could be appointed in a particular year, nor was there a quota of appointments to be filled. The Lord Chancellor made his recommendations for appointment on the basis of the calibre of each individual applicant, as reflected in the views given in that year's round. All applicants who fulfilled the published criteria to the necessary high standard were recommended for appointment.

Feedback

Unsuccessful applicants were encouraged to discuss the outcome of their application with a senior member of Legal and Judicial Services Group. Feedback was given in confidence and usually by telephone. The aim of the feedback discussion was to help applicants to understand why they were not appointed by reference to the degree of support received and the tenor of the views obtained. They were given a full account of the comments received, edited only to the extent necessary to preserve the confidentiality of the source.

Complaints

The Department explored any issues of concern to the applicant during the feedback process. If there remained unresolved problems, applicants were encouraged to write to the Director General, Legal and Judicial Services Group or the Lord Chancellor.

If the applicant remained dissatisfied with the way his or her application had been considered, he or she could lodge a complaint with the Commissioner for Judicial Appointments, who would investigate complaints of discrimination, unfairness or maladministration in the way the procedures had been applied.

Solicitors

Mr. Watts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what plans he has to prevent solicitors canvassing for business in public areas. [125212]

Mr. Lammy: Professional rules prohibit solicitors or their agents making unsolicited visits or telephone calls to members of the public. In addition, The Law Society has issued guidance in respect of immigration advice which prohibits solicitors or those acting on their behalf approaching people arriving at ports of entry. The breach of the rule and guidance is a disciplinary matter for the Law Society.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 17 July 2003

PRIME MINISTER

Cabinet Committees

Liz Blackman: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 26 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 921W, on Cabinet Committees, when he will publish the full membership and terms of reference of Ministerial Committees of the Cabinet. [127305]

The Prime Minister: I have today published the full membership and terms of reference of Ministerial Committees of the Cabinet, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Prime Minister when he will answer the question of 24 February from the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire on IT contracts in his Department above £50 million. [126903]

The Prime Minister: I understand that the hon. Member tabled this question to a number of Departments. However, he did not table it to me.

European Constitution

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his written answer of 16 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 63W, on the EU White Paper, what discussions he expects to occur prior to the next meeting of the European Council; who is expected to preside over its proceedings; and whether Her Majesty's Government will present a provisionally agreed European Constitution for ratification by Parliament. [126546]

The Prime Minister: The Convention on the Future of Europe presented parts I and II of its draft Constitutional Treaty to the European Council at Thessaloniki (19–20 June). The European Council agreed that the draft Treaty represents a good basis for starting negotiations at the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), which will be convened in October 2003. It will be conducted by representatives of the member states and the 10 acceding states. They will take final decisions on a Constitutional Treaty for the European Union by common accord. As with previous EU Treaties, Parliament will have the opportunity to debate it and pass the legislation required to give effect to it before it is ratified.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he had with President Kirchner of Argentina at the progressive governance conference concerning sovereignty of the Falkland Islands; and if he will make a statement. [126272]

The Prime Minister: I did have discussions with President Kirchner on the Falkland Islands. However, the issue of sovereignty was not raised.

Guantanamo Bay Prisoners

Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will request from President George Bush the return of all British prisoners held in Guantanamo Bay to the United Kingdom for the due attention of prosecution and other criminal justice authorities. [126462]

The Prime Minister: The Government is making active representations to the US Government about the future of the UK detainees at Guantanamo Bay. These representations cover a range of options including the possible return of the detainees to the UK and the need for any trials of UK detainees to be fair and in accordance with international law.

The Government has consistently urged the US Government to resolve the position of the detainees.

House of Lords Appointments Commission

Jim Knight: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to lay the first report of the House of Lords Appointments Commission for 2000 to 2003 before Parliament. [126762]

The Prime Minister: I have today received the first report of the House of Lords Appointments Commission. The report covers the commission's first term from May 2000 to May 2003. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

I am grateful to the commission for finding, in fulfilment of their remit, people of distinction whom it has recommended on merit.

I shall be inviting the commission to recommend a small number of non-party-political peers, as well as reporting on the propriety of any party working peers who are recommended, while discussion on the reform of the House of Lords continues.

Accordingly, after following the standard procedures set by the Commissioner for Public Appointments, I have reappointed the chairman and independent members of the commission for further terms of three years, subject to continued discussion on the reform of the House of Lords, not least following our initial response to the Joint Committee report. I am also placing in the Libraries of both Houses my letter to the chairman.

Pursuant to my answers on 19 May 2003, *Official Report*, columns 536–37W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), I would like to clarify that the House of Lords Appointments Commission does come within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments and appointments to the commission are made in accordance with her code of practice

Iraq Dossier

Paul Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister whether the inclusion of *(a)* the information and *(b)* the illustration

of UNSCOM's visits to the Iraqi presidential palaces in the September Dossier was at the instigation of the Security Services. [126468]

The Prime Minister: As we have made clear, the Chairman of the JIC was responsible for the production of the September 2002 dossier.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answers of 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 616W, on intelligence, what progress has been made since 7 July in identifying the sources in the security services responsible for leaks to the media in respect of the Iraq dossier. [126897]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to my previous answer to the hon. Member on 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 616W.

Judicial Committee of the Privy Council

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he had with the Governments of *(a)* New Zealand, *(b)* Antigua and Barbuda, *(c)* Bahamas, *(d)* Barbados, *(e)* Belize, *(f)* Dominica, *(g)* Grenada, *(h)* Jamaica, *(i)* St. Christopher and Nevis, *(j)* Saint Lucia, *(k)* Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, *(l)* Trinidad and Tobago, *(m)* Kiribati, *(n)* Tuvalu, *(o)* Mauritius, *(p)* Anguilla, *(q)* Bermuda, *(r)* the British Virgin Islands, *(s)* Cayman Islands, *(t)* Falkland Islands, *(u)* Gibraltar, *(v)* Montserrat, *(w)* St. Helena, *(x)* the Turks and Caicos Islands, *(y)* the Isle of Man, *(z)* Jersey and *(aa)* Guernsey on his plans to change the legal responsibilities of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council as a court of appeal. [126771]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Department for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Leslie) gave to her today.

Ministerial Visits

David Davis: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list visits within the United Kingdom he has made since 1 April; what the cost was to public funds of each trip; whom he met; and what gifts were received [126988]

The Prime Minister: On visits, the information is not readily available in the format requested. I shall write to the hon. Member once this information is available, and will place copies of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

On gifts, the Government are committed to publishing an annual list of gifts received by Ministers in an official capacity valued at more than £140. The first ever list was published on 14 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 482W. Details of gifts received during 2003–04 valued at more than £140 will be published at the end of the current financial year.

Pay Review Bodies

Liz Blackman: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on payment for Pay Review Body chairs and members. [127304]

The Prime Minister: The Government have decided to pay the chairmen and members of the Pay Review Bodies for the work they carry out. Payment will be made on a per diem basis at a rate of £350 for the chairmen and £300 for other members.

Payment will begin in September.

Plutonium

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received and what meetings he has held this year on the future management of plutonium; and if he will make a statement. [126921]

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware, I have received no representations on this issue.

I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations, it is not my practice to provide details of all such meetings, under exemptions 2 and 7 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions between 31March 2002 and 31 March 2003 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisors travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [126659]

The Prime Minister: The information is not readily available in the format requested. I shall write to the hon. Member once this information is available, and will place copies of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Trade Justice

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Prime Minister how many representations calling for trade justice have been received by the Government this year; and how many of these were from the Orkney and Shetland constituency. [125431]

The Prime Minister: So far this year I have received over 40,000 representations about Trade Justice and Fair Trade.

Between 1 January and 30 June this year, this Government has received over 150,000 representations from MPs, the general public, various charities and NGOs covering a wide range of world trade policy issues.

The information is not held in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Iraq

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what evidence he has received of attempts being made by the Iraqi military to deploy chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons during the war; [126858]

(2) what evidence of the products of weapons of mass destruction programmes have been found in Iraq. [126859]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) at Prime Minister's Questions on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 279.

WALES

Health and Social Care

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Welsh Assembly Government on the need for primary legislation in order to implement the recommendations of the Review of Health and Social Care in Wales advised by Derek Wanless; and whether his Department has had discussions with the Welsh Assembly Government about implementing the four options proposed by the Review to solve the problem of bed-blocking. [126460]

Mr. Touhig: I have regular meetings with the Assembly Minister for Health, Jane Hutt AM, during which she updates me on health policy initiatives launched by her Administration.

I am aware that the Assembly will be publishing a detailed response and action plan in the autumn and it is therefore premature to comment on implementing the recommendations of the Report before then. I welcome Jane Hutt's announcement of an additional £4 million to tackle the immediate problems in the review, namely delayed discharges and alternatives to hospital admission. This money will be channelled through the Local Health Boards where all health and social care interests are represented.

Ministerial Travel

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last used the London Underground in connection with his official duties. [124604]

Mr. Hain: On 25 March 2003.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Supasweet Onion

18. **Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will support the production and promotion of the Supasweet onion in Chicksands, Bedfordshire. [126294]

Mr. Bradshaw: Defra has contributed to the development of the Supasweet onion by funding half the cost of a three-year collaborative research project worth £650,000. The production and promotion of the product is now being taken forward by industry partners and we wish them every success.

Note:

F. B. Parrish and Son of Chicksands is one of five growers or growers' organisations which helped fund the research project. The company is primarily known for its onion production and was the overall winner in the 2003 Grower of the Year Awards.

New Covent Garden Markets Authority

19. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to secure a viable future for the New Covent Garden Markets Authority. [126295]

Mr. Morley: The Saphir Report identifies a future for New Covent Garden Market as a composite market providing a particular service to the central London catering trade. The Department is working closely with the Covent Garden Market Authority to identify ways of developing the Nine Elms site and the market business to provide for future needs. It remains the Government's objective to dispose of the market as a going concern—when this is achieved there will be no further need for the Authority and it will be wound up.

Biofuel Crops

22. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to encourage the use of crops for biofuels. [126298]

Mr. Morley: We have made available £29 million to support the planting of energy crops and the setting up of growers' producer groups. £3.5 million is being made available to develop supply chains for biomass, including energy crops, from harvest to energy end-user; £66 million is being allocated to develop markets for biomass, including energy crops, in heat, combined heat and power, and power generation. Officials are working closely with project developers and others to promote the potential of energy crops.

Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment

23. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on how she proposes to implement the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive. [126299]

Mr. Morley: The Government intend to implement the WEEE Directive in a way that will maximise the environmental benefits for the UK but keep the costs to a minimum.

The Directive was agreed in February 2003, and the Government now have until August 2004 to transpose the Directive into UK law. The first stage of consultation on the WEEE Directive has now concluded and the Government are in the process of analysing the responses. These will be fed into a further consultation paper, due to be issued later this year. A final consultation on the draft Regulations will be issued early next year.

Thames Fisheries

24. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received on the effects of the Shell Haven oil refinery on fisheries in the Thames. [126300]

Mr. Bradshaw: None, but I am aware that concerns have been expressed by fishermen at a public inquiry examining proposals for the redevelopment of the site as the London Gateway port.

Fallen Stock Scheme

25. **Angela Watkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the number of farmers who have signed up to the Fallen Stock Scheme. [126301]

Mr. Bradshaw: No decision has yet been made about whether such a scheme will proceed. However, around 30 per cent. of livestock farmers in England expressed an interest in joining a national scheme if one were to go ahead

Beef

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what arrangements she is making to pay interest on overdue payments of *(a)* beef special premium and *(b)* slaughter premium. [126265]

Alun Michael: The RPA very much regrets the delays in making bovine payments for 2002. The main reason was the introduction by the European Commission of revised rules for calculating aggregated penalties across the bovine schemes. This change has caused difficulties for member states and the Commission recognised this by accepting that payments could be made this year up to 31 July rather than 30 June.

The RPA is making every effort to make as many payments as possibly by 31 July. The RPA will consider whether compensation payments for the delay may be appropriate for payments made after that date.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much money is due in outstanding payments for *(a)* beef special premium and *(b)* slaughter premium for (i) 2001 and (ii) 2002; and when she expects such payments to be made. [126266]

Alun Michael: The information is given in the table.

£

Scheme	*2001 payments issued*	*2001 payments outstanding*	*2002 payments issued*	*2002 payments outstanding*
Beef special premium scheme	111,084,363.74	1,160,740.93	102,502,560.57	10,312,419.37
Slaughter premium scheme	41,933,323	163,792	41,268,488	30,530,948

2001 Payments

The majority of outstanding payments for 2001 relate to claims with unresolved queries and discrepancies. Staff at the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) are working hard to resolve these queries and in many cases this has involved contacting claimants to obtain additional information.

2002 Payments

Claimants under the Beef Special Premium Scheme (BSPS) and Slaughter Premium Scheme (SPS) began receiving their advance payments shortly after the bovine payment window opened on 16 October 2002.

Every effort is being made to make as many payments as possible by 31 July 2003.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received on reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. [126292]

Margaret Beckett: In the last month I, my ministerial colleagues and officials from my Department have attended a number of meetings and events at which CAP reform has been discussed with representatives from farming, environmental, consumer and landowner organisations, as well as Ministers from other countries. We have also received correspondence and telephone calls from hon. Members and members of the public about CAP reform.

Farming Practices

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she will take to encourage farmers to adopt more environmentally sustainable farming practices. [126296]

Mr. Morley: The Government are committed to encouraging more environmentally sustainable farming. I refer my hon. Friend to the statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, made on 26 June 2003, regarding the progress made in this area in the reform of the CAP. Our existing agri-environment schemes (ESA and CSS) have made a significant impact since first introduced, but we want to do more. In addition to reviewing the current schemes, we are currently piloting an 'Entry Level' Scheme that will be available to all farmers across the country from 2005.

Farming Fraud

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what further measures have been taken by the Rural Payments Agency to prevent fraud by farmers, following the Government reply to the recommendations made by the Committee of Public Accounts in its 51st Report of Session 2001–02. [126297]

Alun Michael: The Rural Payments Agency is introducing up to date, integrated computer systems to improve the control of CAP scheme administration. Key elements are a single business identifier and a Rural Land Register to ensure subsidy is only paid on eligible land and to registered customers entitled to receive it.

Flood Risk

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people live in areas with a high risk of flooding. [125577]

Mr. Morley: There is no estimate for the number of people at high risk of flooding throughout the UK.

The UK wide estimate, based on information currently available, is that there are about 2.1 million properties within flood plains. Of these approximately 1.8 million are in England and Wales and the majority of these are protected by flood defence structures.

GM Crops

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of contamination by GM crops on surrounding plant life; what estimate she has made of the radius from sites that could be contaminated by GM crops; and if she will make a statement. [125957]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* Each application for consent for the release a GM crop into the environment must have a full and thorough risk assessment made of its potential impacts. This assessment is scrutinised by the Government's statutory Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE) and is made on a case-by-case basis according to the characteristics of the particular crop. It includes a consideration of the likelihood and consequences if a GM crop were to spread through cross-pollination (with other crop plants or wild relatives) or through seed movement.

ACRE have considered all the GM crops that have been grown in the UK and consent has only been granted where appropriate measures have been taken to avoid adverse effects on the surrounding environment. In the case of the crops in the farm-scale evaluations, the GM crops were kept separate from commercial crops. The separation distances were based on advice from the National Institute of Agricultural Botany published in August 2000 and are not intended to eliminate any cross pollination with equivalent crops at greater distance, but rather to limit it severely. ACRE advised that the actual occurrence of cross-pollination with other crop plants, or wild relatives in the case of oil seed rape, would present no undue risk to human health or the environment. The potential of such cross-pollination is one of the factors being examined in the Farm Scale Evaluation.

Illegal Logging

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when and where the EU action plan on illegal logging will be discussed by the Council of Ministers. [126010]

Mr. Morley: This is a decision for the Presidency of the EU. At Environment Council on 13 June, the UK urged the Presidency to facilitate a full and early discussion of the Action Plan. Since that time, preliminary discussions by officials have been held in Brussels at the EU Working Group on Forestry on 9 July and at the EU Development Co-operation Working Group on 11 July.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the UK Government will press for new legislation to ban the import of illegally sourced timber as part of the EU action plan to tackle the illegal timber trade; and if she will make a statement. [126009]

Mr. Morley: The UK Government wishes to see an end to the import of illegally logged timber into the EU and does not rule out support for such legislation. Equally, the Government recognises the need to ensure that any new legislation is proportionate, enforceable and compatible with WTO regulations. Consequently, in addition to offering broad support to the Commission's recently published Action Plan to tackle illegal logging and its associated trade, the UK will press for the Commission to undertake an immediate assessment of the feasibility and impacts of additional legislative options, including a ban on illegally sourced timber.

Private Sewers (Wales)

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect of the consultation on private sewers on owners in Wales. [126027]

Mr. Hain: I have been asked to reply.

This is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from *(a)* the Welsh Assembly, *(b)* Welsh local authorities and *(c)* other Welsh organisations on the consultation on private sewers. [126028]

Mr. Morley: The public consultation paper seeking views on private sewers was published on 1 July this year jointly by the Department and the Welsh Assembly Government. The consultation period extends until 26 September. We have not received any representations on the consultation on private sewers from Welsh local authorities or other Welsh organisations.

Radioactive Water

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what quantities of radioactive water *(a)* have been removed and *(b)* remain to be moved from Sellafield building B30 as part of the post-operational clean-out (POCO) process; to where this water has been discharged; and whether the POCO activities at B30 have been reported as part of the UK submissions to the OSPAR Ministerial in Bremen in June. [124826]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* About 2,000 cubic metres of water a day are currently flushed through the B30 ponds. The water is treated at the SIXEP plant in Sellafield to remove particulate and principally radioactive caesium and strontium. The resulting low-level radioactive liquid waste is discharged to sea. These discharges were included in the Strategy for Radioactive Discharges 2001–2020, published in July 2002, which was the UK's national report to OSPAR.

Rights of Way Mapping Process

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs by how much the Rights of Way mapping process is over budget; and which other budgets are being used to fund it. [124896]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Agency expects to spend £14.23 million in the current financial year on implementing Part I of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, mainly on mapping open country and registered common land. This compares with an estimate of £11.93 million when the Corporate Plan was prepared. Estimates cannot be exact because the work is largely demand-driven, generated by comments and appeals on the maps.

Over the past two years the Agency has been fully aware of the need to manage these pressures within its increasing budget which is over £98 million this year and I discuss these issues regularly with the Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Chief Executive and members of the Agency's Board.

Water Industry

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of water companies reported financial deficits in 2002. [125574]

Mr. Morley: The Director General of Water Services' published report, "Financial performance and expenditure of the water companies in England and Wales 2001–2002" (Table 4), shows that all companies reported operating profits for the year ended March 2002.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Department since 29 October 2002. [126606]

Alun Michael: As at 16 July, 77 written ministerial statements have been made by the Department.

TREASURY

Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia

Mr. Baron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the occurrence rate of childhood acute lymphoblastic leukaemia was in each of the last five years. [127018]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. John Baron, dated 17 July 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning what the occurrence rate of childhood acute lymphoblastic leukaemia was in each of the last five years. I am replying in his absence. (127018)

The rates for newly diagnosed cases of acute lymphoblastic leukaemia[1] for the most recent five years for which data are available for children aged under fifteen in England are given in the table below.

Rates of newly diagnosed cases of acute lymphoblastic leukaemia[1] per 100,000 children aged under 15, England, 1995–99

	Under 15
1995	3.5
1996	3.4
1997	3.1
1998	3.6
1999	3.3

[1] For the years 1995 to 1999, International Classification of Disease, Tenth Revision (ICD-10), code C91.0.

Source:

Office for National Statistics, "Cancer statistics-registrations. England 1999". Series MBI no. 30. London: The Stationary Office, 2002.

Available on the National Statistics website at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/Mb1_30/MB1_30pdf.

Office for National Statistics, "Cancer statistics-registrations. England 1998". Series MBI no. 30. London: The Stationary Office, 2002.

Available on the National Statistics website at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/Mb1_30/MB1_29pdf.

Office for National Statistics, "Cancer statistics-registrations. England 1995–97". Series MBI no. 30. London: The Stationary Office, 2002.

Available on the National Statistics website at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/Mb1_30/MB1_28pdf.

Tax Credit Helpline

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff are employed to man advisory hotlines for working families tax credit; how many are civil servants; and how many have received training in this area. [117641]

Dawn Primarolo: I said in my comments during the debate on the floor of the House on 10 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 503, that a further 700 staff would be added by 15 April 2003 to the 1,900 staff already deployed on the helpline. These were full-time equivalent figures for the Great Britain helpline. Since then the number has fluctuated, but the average between 14 April and the end of June 2003 was about 2,900. Some of the work was outsourced for a period, and all staff have received appropriate training.

During the same period there was an average of about 3,900 telephone lines servicing the helpline.

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the script used by advisers at the tax credit helpline for responding to callers who have asked for their tax credits to be paid into a Post Office card account. [115676]

Dawn Primarolo: The script used by tax credit staff when dealing with people who have asked for their tax credits to be paid into a Post Office card account follows that placed in the Library by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers given by the then Under-Secretary for Work and Pensions, Malcolm Wicks, on 26 March and 11 April 2003 *Official Report*, columns 289W and 472W.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* telephone lines and *(b)* telephonists there are for the tax credit helpline; and if he will make a statement. [115910]

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what telephone hotlines and advice lines have been operated by his Department for people seeking advice about children's tax credits; what charges apply to each; and how many calls they have each taken. [123896]

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many calls have been made to the tax credit helpline in each month since it was first established; and how many of these calls have been answered; [125413]

(2) how many calls have been made to the MPs' tax credit hotline in each month since it was first established; and how many of these calls have been answered. [125414]

Dawn Primarolo: Telephone helplines have been in operation since August 2002 for claimants for child and working tax credits living in Great Britain and in Northern Ireland. The advisers can answer both general inquiries and inquiries about specific claims. Calls to these lines are charged at local rates.

The number of calls received and handled each month by the Great Britain helpline, rounded to the nearest thousand, appear in the following table:

Calls to the GB child and working tax credit helpline received and handled August 2002 to June 2003

Thousand

	Received[1]	*Handled*[2]
August 2002	28	28
September 2002	179	177
October 2002	324	320
November 2002	394	375
December 2002	268	265
January 2003	852	771
February 2003	1,168	957
March 2003	2,487	1,701
April 2003	2,509	1,768
May 2003	2,000	1,680
June 2003	957	913
Total to June 2003	1,168	8,956

[1] Where the caller selected an option from the call steering menu and was put in a queue to speak to an adviser.

[2] Where the caller spoke to an adviser.

[3] Totals may not equal the sum of individual months because of rounding

The Northern Ireland helpline handled 328,000 calls up to June 2003.

A response line is in operation giving general advice, but not answering inquiries about specific claims. Its had answered 2.7 million calls by the end of June 2003, including both those answered live by an operator and those answered by recorded voice. Calls to this line are free of charge. There are telephone hotlines for tax credits for Members of Parliament in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Calls to these lines are charged at national rate. For the weekly number of calls answered by these hotlines to the week starting 30 April, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) on 11 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W. These hotlines answered 4,4000 calls in the four weeks starting 5 May 2003 and 5,000 during the five weeks starting 2 June 2003. In total, they answered 11,500 calls between 30 December 2002 and the week starting 30 June 2003. It is not known how many calls to these hotlines were not answered.

In addition, the Inland Revenue website contains information on tax credits, and a facility for potential claimants to enter family circumstances to check for eligibility and the size of the award. There were over 7.2 million such checks made to the end of June 2003.

Benefit Payments

Mr. Heald: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire of 9 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 871W, what the April outturn is against the Department for Work and Pensions' target that 85 per cent. of customers should have their benefit paid into their bank accounts by 2005. [125988]

Mr. Boateng: At the end of April 2003 around 43 per cent. of United Kingdom benefit customers were having their benefits paid directly into their bank accounts. From early May 2003 there has been a planned increase in activity to bolster the Direct Payment take up rate. A conversion exercise is under way where customers are being contacted and invited to concert to Direct Payment. This is being backed up with a national advertising campaign. Details of the number of invitations issued and responses issued are published in the House of Commons Library.

Business Rates

Vera Baird: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what extra amount Redcar and Cleveland would have received in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* 2003 under the Treasury's preferred model for local authority retention of business rates. [125927]

Mr. Boateng: The Government published a consultation document on the Local Authority Business Growth Incentive scheme on the 4 July. This invites responses by the 31 October. At this stage we are consulting on the principles and concepts that will guide the design of the scheme. During 2004 we will consult again on a specific proposal.

The benefits to individual local authorities from the scheme will depend on the final design of the scheme and how well individual local authorities respond to the incentives from the scheme.

Census 2001 (Sheffield)

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of Sheffield's 2001 Census information was lost; if he will make a statement on how this information was lost; and what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the methods used to estimate Sheffield's 2001 Census returns. [126125]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Betts dated 17 July 2003:

The National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales has been asked to reply to your recent question regarding your concerns about how the 2001 Census was conducted in Sheffield. (126125)

I can assure you that there were no Census forms lost in Sheffield. It seems likely that your reference to 'lost' information refers to problems with the Census Coverage Survey for Sheffield. This resulted in us not having information for 36 of the sampled postcodes and meant that we could not use the Census Coverage Survey for Sheffield as we had originally intended.

The Census Coverage Survey (CCS) was a key element in the One Number Census process. It was an independent survey conducted shortly after the Census to establish the coverage of the 2001 Census. The information obtained from the Census Coverage Survey was used to enable census population counts to be adjusted for unde renumeration at the national, local and small area level. It was therefore important that the Census Coverage Survey was successful in capturing those persons missed in the Census.

A quality assurance panel was set up to look at the results of the Census from around the country and also to provide advice as problems arose during the processing. After someconsideration, the quality assurance panel felt that the sample for Sheffield from the Census Coverage Survey was not sufficient to make reliable estimates of underenumeration.

However, the methodology for the Census included a contingency strategy that could be used for occasions when it was felt that the Census Coverage Survey had failed to find the people missed from the Census. This contingency strategy involved a method known as "borrowing strength". This strategy involves using the adjustments made for similar Local Authorities when compared with aggregate administrative data and applying these to the Authority for which the strategy is invoked. The method for selecting Local Authorities from which to borrow strength involved using the ONS classification of Local Authorities to identify the five most similar areas in terms of socio-economic and demographic characteristics. By applying the borrowing strength method, the population of Sheffield was increased by 6,100 over and above what would have been achieved had the borrowing strength method not been used. This accounts for approximately 1 per cent. of the total population estimate.

A consultation exercise was undertaken with all Local Authorities in the winter of 2000/1 inviting each Authority to comment on the acceptability of the list of closest Authorities to their own for borrowing strength purposes. Sheffield was given the opportunity to comment at this stage, before the list was finalised and published.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the percentage of total central government expenditure was represented by PFI and PPP annual payments in the financial years *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 2002–03; [125498]

(2) what the total central government expenditure was on PFI and PPP annual payments in the financial years, *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 2002–03. [125499]

Mr. Boateng: Estimated figures for PFI/PPP annual payments total £0.37 billion for 1997–98. These figures can be seen in the 1997–98 Financial Statement and Budget Report: Table 5.6—Estimated forward commitments from signed contracts.

Estimated figures for 1997/98 represent 0.1 per cent. of Total Managed Expenditure (£323.6 billion).

Estimated figures for PFI/PPP annual payments total £4.545 billion for 2002–03. These figures can be seen in the 2002–03 Financial Statement and Budget Report: Table C19—Estimated payments under PFI contracts.

Estimated figures for 2002–03 represent 1.1 per cent. of Total Managed Expenditure (£421 billion—estimated outturn).

Figures for 1992/93 were not compiled at that time.

Chief Economic Adviser

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Treasury's Chief Economic Adviser plays an executive role in the Inland Revenue's dealings with *(a)* individuals and *(b)* businesses. [126471]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chief Economic Adviser to the Treasury has no executive role in the Inland Revenue's dealings with either group.

Child Benefit

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated annual cost would be of changing the child benefit system to pay the higher rate of child benefit in respect of all children of a multiple birth when those children are the oldest in a family. [125858]

Dawn Primarolo: Child benefit is a universal system of support paid to all families who are responsible for a child, irrespective of their means. It is paid until a child reaches the age of 16, or 19 if they remain in full-time non-advanced education.

The higher rate of child benefit is paid in respect of the eldest child family, by date or time of birth, until that child reaches 16, or 19 if appropriate.

To provide an additional "higher rate" for each child of a multiple birth under the current tax and benefit system, where there are no other older children in a family, would cost an additional £15 million a year.

Correspondence

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letter dated 29 May from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan on insurance premium tax. [126776]

John Healey: I have done so.

Customs and Excise

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many times in the past two years the Customs and Excise National Strike Force has undertaken operational duties in west Wales; [118546]

(2) what seizures have been made by the Customs and Excise National Strike Force in west Wales in the last two years. [118532]

John Healey: Pursuant to his answers of 12 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 980–81W, the National Strike Force was in fact deployed to Wales 10 times in the last two years, rather than the total of 16 times since it was established in January 2000, and these deployments included west Wales on four occasions.

Deployments of the National Strike Force are rarely to any single location, and it is not possible to identify from older operational records the specific locations where seizures were made by the National Strike Force. Figures for seizures in west Wales alone are therefore

not available; however, in the last two years in south Wales (including west Wales but excluding Cardiff airport) the National Strike Force seized 180,000 cigarettes but no criminal cash.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions his Department has had with the *(a)* Home Office, *(b)* Secretary of State for Wales and *(c)* Welsh Assembly regarding removal of permanent front-line anti-smuggling customs officers from (i) Chester, (ii) Swansea and (iii) Pembroke ports; and if he will make a statement. [126320]

John Healey: Following the announcement of Customs and Excise's modernisation plans in March, I informed the Home Secretary and wrote to the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales; Customs wrote to Dyfed-Powys police force and to South Wales police force. Customs officials have also discussed their plans with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales.

EU Budget

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the UK's gross receipts from the EU Budget were in 2002. [126496]

Dawn Primarolo: Details of the United Kingdom's public sector receipts from the EC Budget in 2002 can be found in Table 3 (page 40) of the annual White Paper "European Community Finances" (Cm 5800, ISBN 0-10-158002-9) which was published on 30 April.

Financial Services and Markets Act

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to make his assessment of the effectiveness of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000; who will conduct that review; and when the review is expected to be completed. [126655]

Mr. Boateng: No decisions have yet been taken in this matter.

Gift Aid

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the amount of revenue which would be lost if the Gift Aid declaration was replaced by allowing all personal donations to charities to be free of tax; and if he will make a statement. [124909]

Dawn Primarolo: The Gift Aid scheme allows charities to reclaim basic rate tax paid on donations made to them. The donor must give a declaration that they have paid income or capital gains tax at least equal to the amount which the charity will reclaim. If the requirement for the donor to give a declaration and to have paid sufficient tax on the donation were removed and charities simply claimed the equivalent of basic rate tax on all personal donations, the additional cost to the Exchequer is estimated at about £1 billion.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

Mr. Caton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to increase the transparency of *(a)* World Bank and *(b)* IMF decisions about countries coming off track with the heavily indebted poor countries initiative. [125815]

John Healey: The UK continues to be at the forefront of promoting transparency at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. We strongly support country-owned Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and have continually supported the publication of country programme documents and HIPC documents. We have also supported the publication of specific information on the status of all HIPC country cases and PRSPs which is now regularly provided in the context of meetings of the International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) and Development Committee.

Income Tax

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to ensure that the Inland Revenue obtains accurate declarations from employees of that part of their taxable income derived from the sale of gifts from their employer given to them as an employment benefit. [126743]

Dawn Primarolo: Employees are taxable on the value of benefits or gifts they receive from their employer, regardless of whether they subsequently retain or sell them. Employers are obliged in law to report to the Inland Revenue the value of gifts and benefits they provide to employees, in order that these may be properly taxed.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what positions have been held since January 2000 by *(a)* Mr. Graham Dean, former Inland Revenue Officer in the International Division and *(b)* Mr. Robert Fudge, former Inland Revenue Officer in the Special Compliance Office. [124954]

Dawn Primarolo: It would be inappropriate to disclose information relating to members of the staff of the Inland Revenue. Exemption 8 (Public employment, public appointments and honours) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information applies. I have, however, written in the last few days to the hon. Member about the matter which is of concern to him.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by his Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if he will make a statement. [126200]

John Healey: The Treasury has not outsourced any IT contracts since 1997.

The Inland Revenue (IR) has one outsourced contract which has been awarded since 1997. The NIRS2 contract was signed by the DSS in 1997 but subsequently transfered to the IR in 1999, following the transfer of the Contributions Agency. Over the lifetime

of the contract its value has been £200 million. The contract is with Accenture. The contract has been renegotiated during the period, and is still in place.

HM Customs and Excise has let two outsourced IT contracts since 1997. One contract was awarded to Fujitsu C and E Services Ltd., under the Private Finance Initiative in 1999 for 10 years. The contract is for the provision of an outsourced IT and telephony infrastructure. The advertised value of this contract was £500 million. This contract is currently being reviewed under the existing contract change provision, with Fujitsu C and E Services Ltd. The other outsourced IT contract let by Customs in 2000 is with Syntegra. This contract is for the provision of processing import and export freight, which facilitates the collection of duty revenues. The value of this contract is estimated as £53 millionover five years. This contract has not been renegotiated.

IT Licences

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much he spent on IT licences in the last financial year. [125776]

John Healey: The following table gives the amount spent by the Chancellor's Departments and their agencies on IT licences during the 2002–03 financial year, with the exception of OGC Buying Solutions, for which the information requested is not available.

Chancellor's Departments/Agencies	*£*
Debt Management Office	500,000
Government Actuary's Department	88,595
HM Customs & Excise	4,037,419
HM Treasury	377,708
Inland Revenue	15,840,000
National Savings	93,000
Office of Government Commerce	145,485
Office of National Statistics	4,661,000
Royal Mint	178,560
Valuation Office	1,237,556

IT Projects

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what major IT projects with a value in excess of £10,000 he authorised expenditure on in each of the last three financial years. [125720]

John Healey: The information is today being placed in the Library.

Manufacturing Employment

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were employed in the manufacturing sector in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 2003; and what percentage of the workforce this represents in each case. [126862]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Lindsay Hoyle, dated 17 July 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about how many people were employed in the manufacturing sector in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 2003; and what percentage of the workforce this represents in each case. (126862)

The table below shows the number of workforce jobs in the manufacturing sector in March for the specified years.

UK workforce jobs by industry

Thousand (seasonally adjusted)

	Manufacturing (Section D)	*Percentage of workforce*
1979	7,104	26.4
1997	4,456	16.0
2003	3,781	12.8

These estimates are based on the results of regular sample surveys of employers which count the number of employee jobs. Data on self-employment are obtained from the Labour Force Survey.

Redundancy Pay

Rachel Squire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he plans to review the tax threshold for redundancy pay; and if he will make a statement. [126274]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government keep the £30,000 tax exemption limit for redundancy payments under review along with all other aspects of the tax system.

Special Shares

Mr. Challen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 9 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 867W, in which companies the Government holds special shares; what the value is of those special shares; and which departments are responsible for them. [125849]

Mr. Boateng: Responsibility for individual special shares lies with the relevant Secretary of State, as set out in the table. It is not possible to estimate the value of these shareholdings, which are not tradable.

Company	*Secretary of State*
Rosyth Royal Dockyard Ltd.	Defence
Devonport Royal Dockyard Ltd.	Defence
QinetiQ Holdings Ltd.	Defence
BAES (Marine) Ltd.	Defence
AWE plc	Defence
BAE Systems plc	Trade and Industry
Rolls Royce plc	Trade and Industry
British Energy plc	Trade and Industry/Scotland
UK Nirex Ltd.	Trade and Industry
Consignia Holdings plc	Trade and Industry
National Grid Transco plc	Trade and Industry
Scottish Power plc	Scotland
Scottish & Southern Energy plc	Scotland
Viridian Group plc	Northern Ireland
Phoenix Natural Gas Ltd.	Northern Ireland
Belfast International Airport Ltd.	Northern Ireland
British Airport Authority plc	Transport
National Air Traffic Services Ltd.	Transport
London and Continental Railways Ltd.	Transport
Eurostar Ltd.	Transport
Intercapita & Regional Rail Ltd.	Transport
Stena Line plc	Transport
CDC Group plc	DfiD
Partnerships UK Ltd.	Treasury
Troika Ltd.	Treasury

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his plans for disposing of the Government's golden shares. [125832]

Mr. Boateng: The Government hold special shares in 25 companies. Of these companies, HM Treasury is responsible for special shares in Troika Ltd. and Partnerships UK Ltd. Each Department responsible for individual special shares is examining the ECJ's judgments carefully, to ensure that its special shares comply with EC law and continue to be in the public interest. The outcome will depend on the detail of each individual special share.

Strokes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people died from *(a)* strokes and *(b)* stroke-related diseases in each year since 1997, broken down by age group. [126506]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Paul Burstow dated July 2003:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning how many people died from *(a)* strokes and *(b)* stroke-related diseases each year since 1997, broken down by age group. (126506)

I refer you to the answer given in Hansard on 18th July 2001, column 213 to Linda Perham MP indicating that figures are to be found in the annual reference volumes 'Mortality Statistics: Cause DH2.' The latest publication in this series contains figures for stroke for 2001 and is available on the National Statistics website at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/Dh2_28/DH2No28.pdf

Causes of death in England and Wales were coded to the Ninth Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-9) from 1979 to 2000. Cerebrovascular diseases, which includes stroke and related conditions, were coded to 430–438. In the Tenth Revision (ICD-10), introduced in 2001, the same conditions are coded to 160–169. However, the way in which the underlying cause of death is selected from the conditions written on the certificate changed in ICD-10. This led to an increase of approximately 13% in the number of deaths attributed to cerebrovascular diseases in men and 9% in women. Time trends should therefore be interpreted with caution. The effects of the change in classification has been described in detail in ONS publications.[1, 2]

[1] Office for National Statistics. Results of the ICD-10 bridge-coding study, England and Wales, 1999. Health Statistics Quarterly 14 (2002), 75–83.

[2] Rooney C, Griffiths C, Cook L. The implementation of ICD-10 for cause of death coding—some preliminary results from the bridge coding study. Health Statistics Quarterly 13 (2002), 31–41.

Tax Credits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many requests for *(a)* compensation, *(b)* back costs and *(c)* compensation for worry and distress due to mishandling of child and working tax credit applications have been received in each of the last six months; of that number how many have been paid; and how much the average award was. [126389]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to what I said during the debate in the House on 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 860.

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 10 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 746W, on child/working tax credit, whether the statistics on awards in August will be broken down by *(a)* local authority and *(b)* parliamentary constituency. [119731]

Dawn Primarolo: Following earlier statements on this subject, I can update the House to say that statistics on child and working tax credit awards will be published on 10 September. This will include estimates for each local authority and parliamentary constituency.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the average claim for *(a)* the child tax credit and *(b)* the working tax credit is expected to be worth in the current financial year. [119920]

Dawn Primarolo: Statistics on average awards will be published after the end of the tax year, when awards have been finalised.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance has been given to officers on settlement of arrears in payment of working tax credits. [115804]

Dawn Primarolo: As soon as a claim has been processed and a decision made, any arrears payable are generally paid immediately in one lump sum. Where for any reason this does not happen automatically, claimants should contact the Inland Revenue.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the numbers of outstanding claims for *(a)* working tax credit and *(b)* child tax credit; and how many of these were submitted before 4 April 2003. [116826]

Dawn Primarolo: There is a single application form for the two tax credits. As I said in the adjournment debate on 7 July the Inland Revenue have now put in payment claims from more than 4.25 million families. There were also a further 186,000 claims where the further information was required or were being verified (sixty per cent. of which have arrived since 1 June 2003).

I also stated before the Treasury Select Committee on 2 July 2003 that 130,000 claims had been rejected because the claimants were ineligible or because the necessary information had not been supplied despite requests to do so.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what penalties are enforceable against the provider of computer equipment to implement the change in the system of tax credits. [118315]

Dawn Primarolo: I have asked the Inland Revenue to open discussion with the IT contractor on the question of redress. The contract provides that the Inland Revenue can seek redress to recover additional business costs which are attributable to the failings of the IT services.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many claims for emergency interim payments relating to child tax credit applications have been made; and of that number how many have been paid; and what the *(a)* average and *(b)* total value of those payments is; [122696]

(2) how many claims for emergency interim payments relating to tax credits have been made in each of the last 12 months; how many have been paid; and what the *(a)* average and *(b)* total value is of those payments. [123021]

John Thurso: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many claims for emergency interim payments relating to tax credits have been made in each of the last 12 months; how many have been paid; and what the *(a)* average and *(b)* total value is of those payments, broken down by region; [124527]

(2) how many claims for emergency interim payments relating to child tax credit applications have been made; of that number how many have been paid; and what the *(a)* average and *(b)* total value of those payments is, broken down by region. [124528]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of individual same day interim payments made through local offices to claimants of child tax credit (CTC) and working tax credit (WTC) in each month is shown in the following table. Also shown is the number of automatic direct payments made centrally to these claimants in each month.

2003	*Number of same day interim payments made through local offices*	*Number of automatic direct payments made centrally (million)*
April	25,000	8.5
May	175,000	9
June	75,000	9.5
Total to June	275,000	27

The interim payments cover both CTC and WTC, where appropriate, so no separate figures are available for CTC.

Very few similar payments were made for working families' and disabled person's tax credits from July 2002.

No figures are available for the average or total value of these payments, or for the number of claims for such payments that have been refused.

Andrew Selous: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Inland Revenue will pay compensation for *(a)* bank charges and *(b)* mortgage penalty payments incurred as a result of the late or non-payment of tax credits. [125195]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to what I said during the debate in the House on 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 860.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer where a person is owed tax credit back-payments, what mechanism there is for paying it in one lump sum rather than in weekly instalments; and if he will make it his policy to ensure that all eligible claims are paid arrears in a lump sum. [125478]

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer over what period of time and at what intervals backdated child tax credit awards will be paid; and if he will make a statement. [126386]

Dawn Primarolo: As soon as a claim has been processed and a decision made, any arrears payable are generally paid immediately in one lump sum. Where for any reason this does not happen automatically, claimants should contact the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many persons in the Wansbeck constituency are in receipt of *(a)* child tax credit and *(b)* working tax credit; and how many claims are waiting to be processed. [126724]

Dawn Primarolo: Statistics on awards of these tax credits will be published. For progress in processing claims, I refer my hon. Friend to my remarks during the debate on 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 859. Breakdowns by constituency of the figures that I gave are not available.

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many letters to the Inland Revenue from right hon. and hon. Members about working families tax credit applications are awaiting a reply. [123368]

Dawn Primarolo: As at 30 June 2003 there were 35 letters from right hon. and hon. Members to the Inland Revenue about working families tax credit applications that were awaiting a reply.

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide extra resources to help the Inland Revenue in responding to correspondence from right hon. and hon. Members about working families tax credit applications. [123369]

Dawn Primarolo: Extra resources are not required to help the Inland Revenue to respond to letters from right hon. and hon. Members about working families tax credit applications.

Tax Revenues

Mr. Swire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made of the extra revenue generated through taxation on those people who will work until the age of 70 in the next 10 years. [125145]

Dawn Primarolo: Total income tax paid by people aged 65–69 with employment and self- employment income is estimated to be £1.8 billion in 2003–04. The Government will monitor the changing working patterns of older people as part of its on-going work on pensions.

VAT Rebates (Places of Worship)

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the cost was in 2002–03 of administering grants provided under the scheme providing rebates on VAT paid in respect of repairs to places of worship listed as being of architectural significance; and what the value of grants awarded in 2002–03 was; [126186]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on listed buildings which are not places of worship but which are in need of repair of his policy of providing grants equal to VAT paid only in respect of places of worship. [126187]

John Healey: It is the Government's long-term objective to reduce the rate of VAT charged on repairs to listed places of worship from 17.5 per cent to 5 per cent. However, as this change is not permitted under current EU rules, the Commission has agreed to look at UK proposals to amend the VAT rules when the reduced rate provisions are reviewed this year. The listed places of worship grant scheme has been introduced in the interim to award grants equivalent to the savings that would result from a reduced VAT rate.

The total costs of the scheme are published on a routine basis in the annual report of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. That Department monitors the administration of the scheme to ensure value for money is given at all times, and monitors the impact of the scheme to ensure it is working effectively. There is no evidence that the scheme has had any impact on other listed properties.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Department since 29 October 2002. [126607]

John Healey: Seventy-nine.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Lay Magistrates (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs when he plans to proceed with the appointment of lay magistrates in Northern Ireland. [125549]

Mr. Lammy: It is intended to establish the new office of lay magistrate by September 2004. This will necessitate an extensive recruitment campaign with the post of lay magistrate being advertised later this year.

Private Bailiffs

Gregory Barker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs (1) what regulations govern the capacity of a private bailiff forcibly to enter a domicile; and when they were last amended; [126949]

(2) what legislation applies to the governance of bailiffs and private law enforcement agents; and what rights and privileges are afforded to bailiffs in the execution of their duties. [126951]

Mr. Lammy: In March of this year the Government published the White Paper "Effective Enforcement" (Cm 5744) in which it set out its conclusions on the law governing bailiffs, including rights of forcible entry.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what plans the Government have to introduce legislation on bailiffs. [126952]

Mr. Lammy: The Government will introduce legislation when Parliamentary time allows.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what recent representations he has received regarding privately contracted bailiffs. [126953]

Mr. Lammy: Since April 2002, my Department has received 15 items of correspondence on the subject of bailiffs in the context of the Civil Enforcement Review. There has also been one Parliamentary Question on this issue in that time.

In addition, the Department received 84 responses to the Green Paper "Towards Effective Enforcement", which was issued in July 2001. The Department published these responses to consultation in April 2002.

The Department has also received 15 responses to the White Paper "Effective Enforcement", published in March 2003, on bailiff related issues. These responses are being analysed.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what steps are taken by his Department to *(a)* monitor and *(b)* enforce standards within the bailiff industry. [126954]

Mr. Lammy: Enforcement arrangements are fragmented, with some firms and individuals working outside of any recognised structures. This is not satisfactory and we are working with the industry to gather evidence of the number and nature of complaints to help guide the future regulation of enforcement agents.

In May 2002 we published "National Standards for Enforcement Agents". The objective was to raise the standards of the enforcement profession nationally by building on and improving existing guidance and best practice. The standards are intended for the use of all enforcement agents both public and private, the enforcement agencies that employ them and the major creditors who use their services. This is a step towards future legislation and regulation.

A White Paper "Effective Enforcement" was issued in March 2003. It proposes a regulatory system, a single piece of law and fairer fee structure for all enforcement agents.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what licensing procedures there are for *(a)* bailiffs and *(b)* private law enforcement agents. [126955]

Mr. Lammy: There are currently no licensing procedures for bailiffs and private law enforcement agents. We set out the current structures in our Green Paper "Towards Effective Enforcement" issued in July 2001. This included:

County court bailiffs

Certificated bailiffs

Private bailiffs

Distrainors

Sheriffs

Civilian Enforcement Officers; and

Approved Enforcement Agencies.

The White Paper "Effective Enforcement" published in March 2003 proposes a regulation of all public and private sector enforcement services across all areas of warrant enforcement which will include a licensing procedure.

Catherine Meyer

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what plans he has to make representations to the Chief Justice of Germany concerning the case of Catherine Meyer. [125527]

Mr. Lammy: None.

Constitutional Affairs Department

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will list his Department's responsibilities for Scotland. [122515]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) on 19 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 391W.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs (1) where the Department of Constitutional Affairs will be housed; who will have responsibility within his Department for *(a)* constitutional matters, *(b)* Scottish matters, *(c)* Welsh matters and *(d)* matters relating to human rights; and when he intends to publish the list of ministerial responsibilities; [122702]

(2) whether the *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Wales Offices will be housed in the same building as the Department of Constitutional Affairs. [122747]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) on 19 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 391W; and to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on 1 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 255W, regarding housing of the Department.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the relationship between *(a)* Constitutional Affairs, *(b)* Scotland Office and *(c)* Wales Office will be with regard to staffing and personnel matters. [122748]

Mr. Leslie: Staffing matters are the responsibility of the Permanent Secretary at the Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA). There are 49 civil servants currently in post in the Wales Office and a total of 115 in the Scotland Office, of which 33 are staff of the Advocate-General for Scotland. They are all on loan or secondment principally from the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Executive respectively. Staff will be offered the options of either transferring to DCA, remaining on secondment or loan or returning to their parent department or organisation in due course. Line management arrangements for these staff will not be affected by the new arrangements and, whilst we would generally expect DCA personnel policies to apply to staff transferring to my Department, this will depend on individual terms of employment. I also hope that all staff working within the DCA may find it beneficial to work within a wider corporate headquarters environment. I expect that the Wales and Scotland Offices will continue to include a significant number of staff on secondment from the devolved administrations.

Darmesh and Rashik Jamiet

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs when the case of Darmesh (date of birth 27 February 1973) and Rashik (8 December 1977) Jamiet under Ref MP2777 was received in the Lord Chancellor's Department from the Appeal Processing Centre. [125526]

Mr. Lammy: This case has not yet been received by the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA). However, the Immigration and Nationality Directorate Appeals Processing Centre has advised us, that it was sent to the IAA on 11 July 2003.

EU Regulations

Bob Spink: To ask the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs how many regulations originating from the EU have been implemented by the Department in each of the past five years. [120833]

Mr. Lammy: Regulations are, in general, directly applicable in the Member States, without the need for further incorporation into national law. However, some Regulations require UK measures to make them workable and enforceable.

The number of regulations originating from the EU, in which the former Lord Chancellor's Department had the lead, which have come into force in the last five years is as follows:

1998	0
1999	0
2000	0
2001	2
2002	2

Additionally, Council Regulation (EC) 1206/2001, which came partially into force on 1 July 2001, will come fully into force on 1 January 2004.

Joint Guarantors

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs, if he will take measures to ensure that no guarantor of a joint and several personal guarantee is able to default; and if he will make a statement. [124494]

Mr. Lammy: We have no plans to introduce such measures. There is existing case law regulating the relationship between creditors, debtors and their guarantors. The House of Lords has ruled that banks (or a creditor in the same position) should inquire into the status and competence of an individual as guarantor. This is particularly so when the individual is guaranteeing the debts of their spouse or partner. This case applied to a single guarantee, but the principle would extend to joint guarantees.

Judicial Appointments Commission

Mr. Cash: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what limits will be placed on the members of the Judicial Appointments Commission in discussing individual cases with ministers. [126747]

Mr. Leslie: On 14 July 2003, the Government published a consultation paper entitled Constitutional Reform: A New Way of Appointing Judges. The paper seeks views on proposals for the establishment of the new Judicial Appointments Commission. Under the Government's preferred model, the Commission would take responsibility for the entire appointments process prior to the appointment itself. Ministers would not take any part in that process. Under this model, the Commission would generally put forward only one name to the Secretary of State for each appointment. The Secretary of State would either accept that recommendation and make the appointment (or pass the recommendation to the Prime Minister or The Queen as appropriate) or formally reject that recommendation and require another to be put forward. The preferred model is described in more detail in paragraphs 42–48 and 52 of the consultation paper (available in the Members' Library and on the internet at www.dca.gov.uk/consult/iacommission).

Mr. Cash: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs whether the decisions of the Judicial Appointments Commission and the Secretary of State in respect of judicial appointments will be subject to judicial review. [126749]

Mr. Leslie: The decisions of public authorities are generally susceptible to judicial review, applying the ordinary principles of public administrative law. It is for the courts to decide whether to admit an application in any particular case.

Judicial Committee of the Privy Council

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what discussions he had with the governing authorities of *(a)* Anguilla, *(b)* Bermuda, *(c)* the British Virgin Islands, *(d)* Cayman Islands, *(e)* Falkland Islands, *(f)* Gibraltar, *(g)* Montserrat, *(h)* St. Helena, *(i)* the Turks and Caicos Islands, *(j)* the Isle of Man, *(k)* Jersey *(l)* Guernsey, *(m)* New Zealand, *(n)* Antigua and Barbuda, *(o)* Bahamas, *(p)* Barbados, *(q)* Belize, *(r)* Dominica, *(s)* Grenada, *(t)* Jamaica, *(u)* St. Christopher and Nevis, *(v)* Saint Lucia, *(w)* Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, *(x)* Trinidad and Tobago, *(y)* Kiribati, *(z)* Tuvalu and *(aa)* Mauritius on plans to change the legal responsibilities of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council as a court of appeal. [126772]

Mr. Leslie: None. The Government are proposing no changes to the jurisdiction of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in relation to its status as a court of appeal for the jurisdictions listed in the question. In that capacity, it is acting as a court of appeal for independent jurisdictions. It does not belong to the UK alone. Instead of the Law Lords being appointed to the Judicial Committee, the members of the Supreme Court would be so appointed. The right of other senior judges who are Privy Counsellors to sit on the Judicial Committee would remain untouched.

Law Society

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what assessment he has made of the intervention of the Law Society in its role as regulator of *(a)* sole practitioner solicitors and *(b)* legal firms. [126241]

Mr. Lammy: The Law Society is responsible for the regulation of solicitors. Its Office for the Supervision of Solicitors has an Investigation and Enforcement Department, which deals with alleged fraud and serious misconduct which may lead to intervention in the firms concerned. The Government have made no assessment of the Society's interventions into sole practitioners or other solicitors' firms.

Maintenance Orders (Reciprocal Enforcement)

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many Reciprocal Enforcement of Maintenance Orders his Department *(a)* enforced overseas and *(b)* received notification of from overseas and enforced in the UK, in each of the last five years, broken down by state. [125667]

Mr. Lammy: England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland work under devolved powers to establish jurisdiction in the UK and deal with applications from abroad. The numbers for each are listed in the tables.

Reciprocal Enforcement of Maintenance Orders

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*[1]
Incoming Applications from non-UK Jurisdictions to England and Wales						
Australia	45	8	69	42	6	22
Austria	5		1	1		
Barbados						1
Belgium	4		2		5	
Brazil					1	
Canada	43	15	43	45	37	20
Cyprus	1		2	2		
Czech Republic				1		2
Denmark	1			1		
Estonia				1		
Finland	5		7	6	5	4
France	13	1	8	5	2	
Germany	29	1	20	18	12	12
Gibraltar	1		1			
Guatemala					1	
Guernsey		1	1			
Hong Kong	2					
Hungary					1	
India	1		1			
Ireland	84	6	100	47	67	44
Isle of Man	9		14	13	14	8
Israel			1			
Italy		1		1	1	
Jamaica		1	5	3	1	1
Jersey	2		1		1	1
Macedonia						1
Mexico			1			1
Netherlands	4	1	14	11	7	8
New Zealand	3			2	4	
Norway	37	19	42	33	22	2
Papua New Guinea	1					
Poland	14	16	18	29	37	22
Portugal	5	1		5		2
Romania					1	
Singapore			1	1	1	
Slovakia				1		

Reciprocal Enforcement of Maintenance Orders

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003[1]
Slovenia						1
South Africa	36	24	68	29	43	16
Spain						1
Sweden	15	69	58	71	63	32
Switzerland			3	4	5	1
Turkey	1				1	
Uganda	1					
United States	73	31	118	106	113	51
Yugoslavia	1				3	
Zimbabwe	1					
Outgoing Applications from England and Wales to non-UK Jurisdictions						
Australia	11	5	18	14	16	7
Barbados						1
Belgium			1			
Bermuda					1	
Botswana	1					
Brazil	1		1			
Canada	5	12	4	3	4	7
Cayman Islands				1		
Cyprus	4				1	
Denmark	1					
France	6	1	4	4	4	7
Germany	10	3	11	7	5	5
Gibraltar				1		
Greece	1		2		1	
Guernsey	1		1		3	1
Hong Kong	4		2			
Ireland	5	1	9	11	14	8
Isle of Man	2		4	3	2	
Israel			2			
Italy	4		2	2	1	1
Jersey	2		2	1	1	
Kenya	1			1		
Luxembourg					1	
Malaysia	1					
Malta	1		1	1	2	
Mauritius	1					
Netherlands	5			9	4	
New Zealand	9	2	6	4	5	6
Nigeria	1					
Philippines		1	1			
Poland				1		
Portugal	3			1	2	1
Seychelles	1					
Sierra Leone	1					
Singapore			2		2	1
South Africa	4	4	6	5	2	1
Spain	5		7	5	5	10
Sweden			6			1
Switzerland			2	1	1	4
Trinidad and Tobago			2		1	
Turkey			1			
United States	23	33	32	36	30	20
Incoming Applications from non-UK Jurisdictions to Scotland						
Australia	4	8	1	2	3	5
Austria					1	
Barbados						
Bermuda				1		
Brazil						
Canada	4	5	5	6	4	5
Cyprus						
Denmark					1	1
Finland					1	
France						
Germany				1	7	
Gibraltar						
Hong Kong	1					
India		1				
Ireland	2	8	7	3	2	
Isle of Man				1		1
Italy						
Kenya						
Netherlands	1		1	3	3	
New Zealand						1
Norway	5	8	6	4	4	
Philippines						
Poland					3	1
Portugal					1	
Singapore						

Reciprocal Enforcement of Maintenance Orders

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003[1]
South Africa	4	5	2		3	2
Spain						
Sweden		3	3	4	5	2
Switzerland					1	
United States	1	3	9	3	9	3
Outgoing Applications from Scotland to non-UK Jurisdictions						
Australia	2	6	3	0	1	1
Austria						
Barbados	1					
Bermuda						
Brazil					1	
Canada	3				2	1
Cyprus				1		
Denmark					1	1
Finland						
France		3			1	
Germany	3			2		1
Gibraltar	1					
Hong Kong	1					
India						
Ireland	2		1			1
Isle of Man						
Italy	1	2				
Kenya	1					
Netherlands						2
New Zealand					2	1
Norway						
Philippines	1					
Poland						
Portugal						
Singapore		3				
South Africa		1	1			
Spain					3	
Sweden				1		
Switzerland					2	
United States	5	4	6	4	6	7
Incoming Applications from non-UK Jurisdictions to Northern Ireland						
Australia				1		1
Canada	1	1			2	
Cyprus			1			
Finland						1
Germany	1		1	1		
Ireland	1	6	7	3	5	3
Isle of Man	1	2	2	2	2	1
Netherlands			1			
Norway					1	
South Africa					1	
Sweden	1	1		1	1	1
United States		2	1	3	2	5
Outgoing Applications from Northern Ireland to non-UK Jurisdictions						
Ireland	1			3		
Isle of Man						1
Netherlands				1		
Sweden					1	

[1] 2003 figures to June 30 only.

Marianna Hildyard

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs, when Marianna Hildyard was invited to become a QC. [152181]

Mr. Leslie: Marianna Hildyard applied for appointment as a QC in the 2002 Silk round and was appointed on 9 April 2002.

National Land Information System

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs pursuant to his answer of 19 May, *Official Report*, column 653W, on the National Land Information System (NLIS), what steps the Government have taken to resolve vires and

governance issues; when the review of governance and CGSG is expected to be completed; what sources outside government deliver relevant third party land and property information via NLIS; and what steps the Government have taken in the past four years to facilitate negotiations with sources outside Government for the delivery of relevant third party information. [126637]

Mr. Lammy: As stated in the answer of 19 May, the governance of NLIS is not a matter for government. National Land Information Service (NLIS) is a non-statutory service operated by private companies, the Government is not aware of any vires issues affecting NLIS. The review of the CGSG is expected to be completed by October 2003. In relation to the delivery of relevant third party land and property information, it is for the relevant NLIS companies (Local Government Information House and the NLIS hub provider) to enter into agreements with data providers on such terms and conditions as they consider appropriate. Central government is not directly involved. However, the NLIS website (www.nlis.org.uk) states that NLIS obtains land and property data from Land Registry, Coal Authority, Environment Agency, local authorities, Ordnance Survey and the National Land and Property Gazetteer. Further information can also be found on the websites of the individual channel providers.

Overseas Electors

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how a UK citizen who lives abroad may register to vote as an overseas elector. [126767]

Mr. Leslie: A UK citizen living abroad should apply to the electoral registration officer (ERO) for the area in the UK in which (s)he was most recently registered if (s)he wishes to be included on the overseas electors' list. An application must include certain prescribed information and initially be witnessed by another UK citizen, and thereafter be renewed annually with the ERO. Once on the overseas electors' list, the elector is entitled to vote in any general or European parliamentary election that takes place in the UK for a period of 15 years from the time the elector was last included on a UK electoral register.

Pension Data Protection

Mr. Watts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what plans he has to remove the data protection controls which restrict pension information being released to company administrators. [125209]

Mr. Lammy: Disclosures of personal information may be made consistently with the Data Protection Act 1998, provided that they comply with the Act's eight general principles of good information handling, or meet the terms of a "non-disclosure" exemption. The Act gives effect in UK law to the 1995 EC Data Protection Directive, which is binding on all member states of the European Union. I understand that my hon. Friend has recently written to the Department about this matter and that my noble Friend Lord Filkin, who has responsibility for this policy area, has written to him to clarify the nature of the particular problem to which he refers.

Public Participation in Politics

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what steps the Government has taken to encourage public participation in politics. [125179]

Mr. Leslie: This Government introduced legislation to set up the independent Electoral Commission, which has a duty to educate and inform the public about the importance of participation in the democratic process.

The Government has also introduced, from 2002, citizenship education into the national curriculum. The programme of study includes teaching pupils about the importance of voting and participation in the democratic process which is intended to give young people sufficient knowledge to engage with the political process.

Solicitors (Regulation)

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what plans he has to change the regulatory system used in relation to solicitors in the UK. [126242]

Mr. Lammy: We announced in July 2002 that we will undertake a review of the regulatory framework for legal services in England and Wales. Details of the independent review will be announced soon.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what assessment he has made of the case for making the regulatory system used in relation to solicitors in the UK a fully independent body. [126243]

Mr. Lammy: I have made no such assessment. However, we are aware of concerns surrounding the regulation of legal services and will be announcing details soon of a review of the regulatory framework in England and Wales.

Supreme Court

Mr. Cash: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs who will be responsible for the rules of procedure of the new Supreme Court. [126745]

Mr. Leslie: That is a matter we will wish to consider in consultation with the present Lords of Appeal in Ordinary, who will form the initial members of the new Court.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many planning applications have been made to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department. [124805]

Mr. Lammy: Since August 2001, when the current planning regulations on mobile telecommunication masts came into force, there have been no planning applications and no applications for prior approval to site telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Department and its predecessors since 29 October 2002. [126614]

Mr. Lammy: 25 written ministerial statements have been made by my Department and its predecessor since 29 October 2002.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on United Kingdom support for a national Afghan army. [125706]

Mr. Ingram: While the United States is the G8 lead nation for creating the Afghan National Army (ANA), since March 2003 the United Kingdom has provided assistance by training the ANA's Junior Non-Commissioned Officers. The UK has also contributed £5 million to pay for ANA salaries. Finally, the UK trained and supported the First Battalion of the Afghan National Guard until it was merged into the wider ANA training programme in January 2003.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the United Kingdom Provincial Reconstruction Team in the Mazar-e-Sharif region of Afghanistan will liaise with Afghan military forces acting under direct authority of the Afghan Interim Administration. [125707]

Mr. Ingram: Two of the roles of the Provincial Reconstruction Team are to extend the capacity of the Afghan Transitional Authority and facilitate Security Sector Reform. The Team will therefore liaise as appropriate with units of the Afghan National Army that deploy within the Team's Area of Responsibility.

Armed Forces (Health Care)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of personnel not fit for employment and awaiting NHS treatment in *(a)* the Royal Navy, *(b)* the Army and *(c)* the RAF. [118800]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 12 June 2003]:* The information requested is not available centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. As at January 2003, 18,338 Service personnel were medically downgraded. Some 40 per cent. of medically downgraded personnel are deployable on military operations although not at the front line, and most of the others are able to undertake some form of military duties. Only a small proportion were not employable in any capacity. The only information held centrally on the numbers of Service personnel awaiting medical treatment relates to those awaiting treatment at NHS Hospital Trusts which host the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine and the Ministry of Defence Hospital Units. As of 31 March 2003, the latest date for which figures are available, 967 Service personnel were awaiting in-patient treatment, 1332 were awaiting day-case treatment and 3349 were awaiting out-patient appointments.

Arms Sales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* arms, *(b)* armaments and *(c)* military equipment sold by the UK Government in the last three years, with their destination. [123416]

Mr. Ingram: Individual disposals of defence property requested amount to many hundreds of sites. I will write to the hon. Member once the information has been collated and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Details of the disposal of all surplus armaments and other military equipment as requested would consist of tens of thousands of individual transactions and could only be provided a disproportionate cost. Licences issued for surplus major equipment exported on a Governments-Government basis are listed in the Strategic Export Controls Annual Reports, which are available in the Vote office and on the FCO website at www.fco.gov.uk.

Army (Drug Testing)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 25 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 876W, on drugs, what investigations he has conducted to determine why specific army units have yielded relatively large numbers of positive results on compulsory drugs testing; and what steps he has taken to address the drug problem in units scoring highly on CDT. [125726]

Mr. Caplin: The Army has vigorous education and training programmes aimed at deterring drug misuse, and steps taken include drugs awareness lectures and regular poster campaigns to promote awareness on the dangers and consequences of the misuse of drugs. Units with high positive rates are tested more frequently, and are also likely to be given a Drug Awareness Presentation by people with first hand experience of the consequences of drug misuse in relation to Army life.

ASRAAM

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason the Tornado F3 aircraft will not be fitted with Helmet Mounted Sight capability for ASRAAM. [125601]

Mr. Ingram: Fitting Helmet Mounted Sight (HMS) to Tornado F3 to operate the Advanced Short-Range Air-to-Air Missile (ASRAAM) could not be achieved before 2005. Carrying out the required integration work would disrupt the aircraft's operational availability until then. Tornado F3 is expected to retire from service by 2009. It would not, therefore, be cost-effective to fit HMS to Tornado F3 to operate ASRAAM.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his assessment is of the capability improvement of ASRAAM over the AIM9M and AIM9L Sidewinder missiles. [125602]

Mr. Ingram: The Advanced Short-Range Air-to-Air Missile (ASRAAM) provides a significant overall improvement in capability to that provided by AIM9 missiles. In particular, ASRAAM flies faster and further and is more agile than AIM9 missiles, enhancing the Royal Air Force's ability to engage enemy aircraft. ASRAAM also demonstrates greater counter-measures performance, greater lethality and better target acquisition than AIM9 missiles. These are all key factors in enabling our pilots to achieve air superiority, not only now, but also against all known emerging threats.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason Tornado F3 aircraft have not received an AMRAAM datalink upgrade as part of the Capability Sustainment programme. [125603]

Mr. Ingram: Tornado F3 aircraft are receiving a datalink upgrade as part of the ongoing AMRAAM Optimisation Programme. This programme remains on track to complete on schedule in 2004.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Jaguar GR3A has been wired for ASRAAM; and what plans he has for the Jaguar GR3A to be equipped with ASRAAM. [125604]

Mr. Ingram: The Advanced Short-Range Air-to-Air Missile (ASRAAM) is compatible with the wiring in Jaguar GR3A. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the then Under-Secretary of State for Defence on 7 March 2000, *Official Report*, column 653W to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch).

Eurofighter Typhoon

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Typhoon will be capable of delivering *(a)* Storm Shadow, *(b)* Precision Guided bombs, *(c)* ALARM, *(d)* Brimstone, *(e)* unguided bombs and *(f)* cluster bombs in operations. [125614]

Mr. Ingram: When Typhoon becomes available for operational deployment in the second half of this decade it will be equipped primarily to carry out air defence sorties but will also have a limited ground attack capability. On current plans, Typhoon will be capable of delivering both ALARM and unguided bombs at that stage. Subsequent incremental operational enhancements will develop Typhoon into a truly multi-role weapon system. The content and timing of these enhancements are the subject of ongoing negotiations with industry and partner nations. Our aim, however, is for a fully enhanced multi-role Typhoon to become available for operations early in the next decade. We have no plans for cluster bombs to be fitted to Typhoon.

Bowman System

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which units will be equipped with the Bowman system when it first enters service; and when Bowman will be ready for operational deployment. [125619]

Mr. Ingram: 12 Mechanised Brigade HQ and Signals Squadron, 1st Bn The Royal Anglian Regiment and 1st Bn The Coldstream Guards, are scheduled to be equipped with Bowman by the target In-Service Date of 30 March 2004. Following that date, they would be capable of engaging in operations other than war.

The remaining units of 12 Mechanised Brigade and its associated Divisional troops will be progressively equipped and trained to operate and support Bowman. 12 Mechanised Brigade will be ready for war fighting operational readiness when it has completed operational training and is declared as being at "High Readiness". Target date is June 2005.

Challenger 2

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what Territorial Army personnel have received training on Challenger 2 in the past two years; and if he will make a statement. [126141]

Mr. Caplin: A total of 330 Territorial Army personnel from The Royal Yeomanry, The Royal Wessex Yeomanry and The Royal Mercian and Lancastrian Yeomanry have been trained as gunners, loaders, and instructors on Challenger 2 in the past two years.

Chocolate

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the reasons his Department *(a)* ended its order for chocolate with Duncans of Scotland and *(b)* placed the order with Nestlé; [126326]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence ended its order for chocolate with Duncans of Scotland and placed the order instead with Nestlé UK Ltd. on grounds of quality and cost.

Cluster Munitions

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of using cluster munitions in the war in *(a)* Iraq and *(b)* Afghanistan. [125088]

Mr. Ingram: No cluster munitions were used by United Kingdom forces in Afghanistan. The cost of munitions consumed in Iraq in 2002–03 is being calculated. Once it has been audited and approved by the National Audit Office I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Defence Contracts

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list category A projects awarded in the last three years where US companies and the UK subsidiaries of US companies were sub-contractors receiving contracts in excess of £100 million. [126115]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the value of defence and defence-related *(a)* imports from and *(b)* exports to the United States of America was in the last three years for which figures are available. [126113]

Mr. Ingram: The value of goods exported to individual countries is published in the Government's annual report on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of these reports, the

most recent covering 2002, are available from the Library of the House and via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website www.fco.gov.uk.

The values of defence imports into the United Kingdom from the USA are as follows:

	Current prices (£ million)
1999	660
2000	838
2001	1,474

Data for imports during 2002 is not yet available.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list category A projects and their approximate values awarded in the last three years to US companies and the UK subsidiaries of US companies. [126114]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Defence Expenditure

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on *(a)* the front line and *(b)* procurement in current prices in each year since 1999–2000; and what his plans are for each year until 2005–06. [125589]

Mr. Ingram: This information is published in The Government's Expenditure Plans 2003–04 to 2005–06. Tables two and three contain details of the Ministry of Defence's resource consumption and capital expenditure broken down into categories, which include Front Line and Procurement. These tables detail outturn for 1999–2000 to 2002–03 (estimated) and plans for 2003–04 to 2005–06 at outturn prices. These figures can be re-based to constant prices using the factors available from the HM Treasury website,

A copy of The Government's Expenditure Plans 2003–04 to 2005–06 has been placed in the Library of the House.

Defence Logistics Organisation

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the contracts *(a)* initiated and *(b)* changed by the Defence Logistics Organisation within (i) one week, (ii) two weeks and (iii) one month of the (A) deployment of troops and (B) commencement of hostilities for Operation Telic. [122045]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO) places a large number of contracts on a daily basis in support of a wide spectrum of operational and non-operational requirements. The DLO does not maintain a central record of all contracts, and production of a list of contracts initiated or changed during the periods specified could only be produced at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Urgent Operational Requirements placed by the Defence Logistics Organisation within *(a)* one week, *(b)* two weeks and *(c)* one month of the commencement of (i) Operation Telic and (ii) the hostilities in Afghanistan. [122046]

Mr. Ingram: No Urgent Operational Requirements were placed by the Defence Logistics Organisation over the periods of the operations stated.

Drug Seizures

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what value of drugs has been confiscated in operations involving Royal Navy warships in each of the past two years. [126139]

Mr. Ingram: Royal Navy warships provide assistance to HM Customs and Excise and other anti-narcotics agencies resulting in the seizure of drugs worth some £40 million in 2001–02 and some £110 million in 2002–03. So far in 2003–04 drugs worth approximately £500 million have been seized.

Drummore Harbour

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the accessibility of Drummore harbour to seacraft. [125735]

Mr. Caplin: The accessibility of Drummore Harbour is not a matter for the Ministry of Defence.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the EU Directives and Regulations which have been implemented by his Department since 17 April 2002. [106841]

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many regulations originating from the EU have been implemented by his department over each of the last five years. [120854]

Mr. Caplin: EU Regulations are, in general, directly applicable in the member states, without the need for implementation in national law.

I refer the hon. Members to the answer my right hon. Friend and the Foreign Secretary gave on 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 64–65W, to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink).

Many regulations apply across many different Whitehall Departments. Information relating to implementation of regulations is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Galileo Project

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his letter D/S of S/GH 3295/03/Y, what progress has been made on interoperability with the United States in relation to the Galileo Project. [126269]

Mr. Hoon: Negotiations continue between the European Union and the United States on the interoperability of the Galileo satellite navigation system and the US Global Positioning System.

Gulf War Illnesses

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his letter D/US of S/IC 3139/05/6, what the most recent results of his longitudinal studies into tracking Gulf War illnesses are. [126268]

Mr. Caplin: As part of our portfolio of research into the ill-health suffered by some United Kingdom veterans of the 1990–91 Gulf Conflict, we funded a long term study of the changing health over a three-year period of a cohort of veterans of that conflict. The study is complete and the results are to be published in a scientific journal following peer-review. In May, we announced plans for research into the physical and psychological health of those who deployed to the Middle East on Operation Telic on 7 May 2003, *Official Report*, columns 34–36WS. This includes initiating a longitudinal study of veterans, the results of which will be published in the peer reviewed scientific literature when available.

Hermitage Site

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the Ministry of Defence site at Hermitage, Berkshire. [126376]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence is undertaking a study to examine the operational benefits of reducing the Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency (DGIA) estate from three principal sites to two. One of the Business Units of DGIA is the Geographic Engineer Group (GEG), which is located at Hermitage, near Newbury in Berkshire. Initially, the study will consider the operational benefits of moving the GEG from Hermitage to RAF Brampton, Cambridgeshire, where it would be co-located with another DGIA Business Unit, the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre (JARIC). If it is concluded that there are operational benefits, the feasibility of undertaking co-location will be assessed in the second phase of the study. The study is expected to be completed by the end of February 2004.

The MOD regularly conducts such studies, with a view to improving operational effectiveness and value for money. There will be full consultation with all people potentially affected by the outcome of the study. No decisions on a move have been made and options for the use of the Hermitage site, should the current occupants move, have not yet been considered.

HMS Bulwark

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Bulwark will be operational. [125618]

Mr. Ingram: On the basis of current information, it is expected that HMS Bulwark will enter service with the Royal Navy towards the end of next year and be available for operational deployment in the spring of 2005. However, the programme for completion of HMS Bulwark is yet to be finalised with the contractor, BAE Systems. When dates are confirmed, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Iraq

Adam Price: To ask the Prime Minister what the status is of the Iraqi prisoners handed over to the US army by British troops. [125247]

Mr. Ingram: As at 8 July, the United States was holding on behalf of the United Kingdom one prisoner of war and 23 internees captured by British Forces, who are either suspected of committing criminal offences or are interned where necessary for imperative reasons of security in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which countries are providing troops for peacekeeping duties in Iraq. [124464]

Mr. Hoon: At least 18 states are expected to contribute military forces and personnel to work alongside United Kingdom and United States troops in the multi-national stabilisation force in Iraq. These states are Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Mongolia, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Thailand and Ukraine. New Zealand will provide engineers for humanitarian and reconstruction tasks. Other nations are also expected to contribute.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training was given to Army personnel deployed on Operation Telic in respect of use of the grenade launchers for SA80A2. [125593]

Mr. Ingram: A specialist training team was deployed to Kuwait and Iraq, to provide in-theatre training to selected battalions on the use of the SA80 Under-slung Grenade Launcher (UGL). Some units had already received training, relating to their previous deployment to Afghanistan.

The main focus of the team was to train unit instructors and Senior Non-commissioned Officers, who then oversaw the training of other individuals within their units. This training was accompanied by training to unit armourers on holding and maintaining the UGL and its ammunition.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when orders were placed for additional desert clothing which was required for Operation Telic. [125595]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 46W, to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock).

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many servicemen and women were *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured in the conflict in Iraq. [118047]

Mr. Ingram: As of 10 July, 43 United Kingdom military personnel had died since the start of coalition military operations against Iraq. All were men. Thirty-four were killed in action or subsequently died of wounds received and nine died in non-battle accidents or from natural causes; 155 UK military personnel were injured in battle. We do not hold central records for those injured in other incidents.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of each of the friendly fire incidents involving British personnel in Iraq; what changes are planned to reduce future occurrences; and if he will make a statement. [125982]

Mr. Ingram: Thorough investigations are on-going into all such incidents. We will give close consideration to the reports and recommendations of these

investigations, and where appropriate, will consider what can be done further to improve the safety of our forces on operations.

Operation Telic

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when UORs for Operation Telic were first issued. [125567]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* The Ministry of Defence began to approve urgent operational requirements as part of contingency planning for possible operations in Iraq in mid-October 2002.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when all Army personnel based in *(a)* Iraq and *(b)* Kuwait for Operation Telic had been issued with full desert kit. [125963]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when underslung grenade launchers for Operation Telic were first issued; and to which battlegroups. [125964]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* Underslung Grenade Launchers were first issued in support of Operation Telic in early April 2003 to Battle Groups within 16 Air Assault Brigade which was part of one UK Armoured Division.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Camel water bottles were first issued for Operation Telic; and what percentage of Army personnel have been issued with them. [125965]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* Army personnel are all issued water bottles as standard issue kit. In addition, 10,000 Personal Hydration Systems (PHS) were initially ordered for Operation Telic. One of the manufacturers uses "Camelbak" as the trade name for its product. The first receipt of the PHS in theatre was in early February 2003. A further 15,800 PHS have since been ordered. The majority of these have been sent to theatre, although it is not possible to determine what percentage of Army Personnel have received a personal issue of this item of equipment.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the operational period for the biological and chemical attack detectors on Challenger 2 tanks in Operation Telic. [125966]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* I assume the hon. Member is referring to the Challenger 2 Main Battle Tank NEC filtration system. I am, however, withholding this information under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reservists served with *(a)* 1 Bn Black Watch, *(b)* 1 Bn Royal Irish Regiment, *(c)* 1 Bn The Duke of Wellington's Regiment and *(d)* 1 Bn Royal Regiment of Fusiliers during Operation Telic. [126099]

Mr. Caplin: As at 14 July 2003, the following number of reservists have served on Operation Telic with each of the battalions:

Battalion (Bn)	*Number of reservists*
1 Bn Black Watch	37
1 Bn Royal Irish Regiment	74
1 Bn The Duke of Wellington's Regiment	0
1 Bn Royal Regiment of Fusiliers	35

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many sponsored reserves served on Operation Telic and with which units. [126100]

Mr. Caplin: As at 16 July, a total of 94 sponsored reserves (SRs) have served on Operation Telic. This figure is broken down as follows:

64 served on the Strategic Service Ships MV Eddystone, MV Hurst Point and MV Hartland Point;

26 served with the RAFs Mobile Meteorological Unit (some have completed more than one deployment); and

4 SERCo SRs attached to 32 Sqn RAF provided engineering support for BAe 125 aircraft.

The use of SRs for Op Telic depends on operational requirements and they will continue to be used in response to operational needs.

Joint Strike Fighter

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Joint Strike Fighter aircraft will be allocated to the *(a)* Fleet Air Arm and *(b)* RAF if the current requirement stands at 150 aircraft; and which squadrons will operate the aircraft. [125598]

Mr. Ingram: We intend that a joint force, comprising personnel from both the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, will operate the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF). The way in which this force will be configured will be determined closer to JSF's planned in-Service date, which is 2012.

Maritime Airborne Surveillance and Control Programme

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an initial gate announcement on the Maritime Airborne Surveillance and Control programme. [125600]

Mr. Ingram: We are continuing to refine plans for the MASC programme. Further details will be released in due course.

Medical Records

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to make service personnel medical records fully accessible to the service person concerned and his or her medical advisors; and if he will make a statement. [120004]

Mr. Caplin: Serving members of the Armed Forces and ex-Service personnel are entitled to access to their medical records in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. If serving or former members of the Armed Forces want their medical records to be

made available to third parties, such as their civilian healthcare provider or solicitor, their explicit written consent to the release of their records is required.

Medical Treatment (Charging Arrangements)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the charging arrangement between his Department and *(a)* the Department of Health and *(b)* NHS acute trusts for the treatment of armed forces personnel. [117884]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 9 June 2003]:* The Ministry of Defence has Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with the NHS Hospital Trusts which host the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine and the MOD Hospital Units (MDHUs). In accordance with each SLA, the host Trust pays MOD a proportion of the costs of military clinical personnel working within the Trust, and the MOD pays for the treatment of Service personnel by the Trust. The SLAs include financial incentives for the host Trust to meet waiting time targets set by my Department. A pilot scheme for fast-tracking orthopaedic cases is currently being run at MDHU Northallerton under the provisions of the SLA but at additional cost.

Separate charging arrangements apply in respect of the Ministry of Defence's reimbursement of costs incurred by the Department of Health in support of Operation TELIC.

Naval Air Defence

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his assessment is for the current requirements for naval anti-air warfare capabilities; and if he will make a statement. [125592]

Mr. Ingram: The Royal Navy's current anti-air warfare (AAW) capabilities are provided by the Seadart missile on the Type 42 Destroyers and the Seawolf missile on the Type 22 and Type 23 Frigates. We are currently considering a number of projects to maintain the capability of Seawolf. The Type 45 Destroyers are expected to begin replacing the Type 42s from 2007 and will be fitted with the Principal Anti-Air Missile System (PAAMS).

Northern Ireland

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which infantry regiments have served in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years. [125616]

Mr. Ingram: The following Infantry Regiments have been committed to the General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland to serve in Northern Ireland over the last five years. The list does not include those Infantry Battalions temporarily transferred from Land Command for the main marching season.

Infantry units under GOC (NI) command 1998–2003

The 1st Battalion, Grenadier Guards

(June 1999 to December 1999, November 2001 to May 2002)

The 1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards

(September 1999 to March 2000, May 2001 to May 2003)

The 1st Battalion, Scots Guards

(March 1998 to April 2000, June 2001 to November 2001)

The 1st Battalion, Welsh Guards

(May 2003-)

The 1st Battalion, The Royal Scots (The Royal Regiment)

(March 1999 to September 1999, August 2000 to April 2002)

The 2nd Battalion, The Princess of Wales Royal Regiment

(November 1998 to May 1999, June 2002-)

The 1st Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers

(April 1997 to May 1999, December 2001 to June 2002, March 2000 to September 2000)

The 2nd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers

(April 2003-)

The 1st Battalion, The King's Regiment

(March 1999 to March 2001)

The 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment

(May 1999 to May 2001)

The 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment

(November 2000 to June 2001, June 2002 to December 2002)

The 1st Battalion, The Devonshire and Dorset Regiment

(September 2000 to March 2001, April 2002-)

The 1st Battalion, The Light Infantry

(June 2000 to December 2000)

The 2nd Battalion, The Light Infantry

(January 1997 to March 1999, December 1999 to June 2000)

The 1st Battalion, The Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire

(November 1999 to May 2000, December 2001-)

The 1st Battalion, The Green Howards (Alexandra Princess of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment)

(May 1999 to November 1999, April 2002-)

The 1st Battalion, The Royal Highland Fusiliers (Princess Margaret's Own Glasgow and Ayrshire Regiment)

(March 2001-)

The 1st Battalion, The Cheshire Regiment

(July 1996 to August 1998, June 1999 to December 1999, June 2002 to December 2002)

The 1st Battalion, The Royal Welch Fusiliers

(August 1998 to August 2000, June 2001 to December 2001)

The 1st Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Wales

(June 1998 to December 1998)

The 1st Battalion, The King's Own Scottish Borderers

(September 2001 to March 2002)

The 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment (27th (Inniskilling) 83rd and 87th and the Ulster Defence Regiment)

(June 2001 to December 2001)

The 1st Battalion, The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment

(March 1998 to September 1998, April 2000 to April 2002, December 2002 to June 2003)

The 1st Battalion, The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment

(December 1999 to December 2001, April 2003-)

The 1st Battalion, The Queen's Lancashire Regiment

(August 1997 to December 1999, March 2001 to September 2001)

The 1st Battalion, The Staffordshire Regiment (The Prince of Wales's)

(May 1998 to November 1998)

The 1st Battalion, The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment)

(December 1998 to June 1999)

The 1st Battalion, The Highlanders (Seaforth, Gordons and Camerons)

(June 1998 to December 1998, June 2000 to December 2000)

The 1st Battalion, The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Princess Louise's)

(February 1997 to March 1999, March 2001-)

The 1st Battalion, The Parachute Regiment

(December 2000 to June 2001)

The 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment

(December 1998 to June 1999, December 2000 to June 2001, September 2002 to April 2003)

The 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment

(December 1999 to June 2000, December 2001 to June 2002)

The 1st Battalion, The Royal Green Jackets

(March 1999 to March 2001, May 2002 to November 2002)

As well as the Infantry Regiments listed above there are also the three Home Service Battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment permanently based in Northern Ireland.

Procurement

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answers of 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 46W, on procurement, and 20 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 885W, on Type 23 frigates, which ships will be provided with the Sonar 2087 system; what plans he has for those which will not; and if he will make a statement. [125368]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 516W, 12 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 47W, and 13 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 139W, to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis).

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the savings have been achieved through *(a)* cancellation, *(b)* delay and *(c)* scaling back of procurement programmes in each year since 1997. [125612]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Royal Irish Regiment

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people serve in the Royal Irish Regiment. [125905]

Mr. Ingram: As at 18 June 2003, there are 2,620 full-time personnel and 1,340 part-time personnel serving in the headquarters, depot, general service and home service battalions of The Royal Irish Regiment.

RV Triton

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the trials programme of RV Triton. [126140]

Mr. Ingram: A comprehensive trials programme has now been completed in conjunction with the United States Government. These trials are an integral part of a research and development programme that also involves model experiments and computational analysis, and which is leading to the availability of design tools and design guidance for trimaran ships.

Service Manning Requirement

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have taken place in each Service's manning requirement since April 1997. [125607]

Mr. Ingram: The trained requirements for the armed forces are as follows:

	All Services	*Naval Service*	*Army*	*RAF*
1 April 1997	205,720	42,910	106,360	56,440
1 April 1998	201,940	41,940	105,770	54,530
1 April 1999	199,240	40,940	105,270	53,020
1 April 2000	198,160	39,860	106,400	51,900
1 April 2001	198,460	39,900	106,970	51,590
1 April 2002	196,150	39,180	106,970	49,990
1 April 2003	195,130	38,510	106,980	49,640
1 June 2003	194,860	38,490	106,730	49,640

Note:
Due to founding methods, used totals may not always equal the sum of the parts.

Services Training

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he will make a statement on progress in implementing the recommendations of the recent tri-service audit of initial training; [123942]

(2) what the estimated cost will be for *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each of the three services to implement the recommendations of the recent tri-service audit of initial training; [123943]

(3) when all the recommendations of the recent tri-service audit of initial training will be implemented; [123944]

(4) what funding has been allocated to implement the findings of the tri-service audit of initial training. [123945]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the written statement I made on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 35–36WS.

Skynet 5

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when his Department expects to finalise the Skynet 5 contract with Paradigm; and if he will make a statement; [125570]

(2) on what grounds his Department chose the joint bid for the Skynet 5 deal from BAE and EADS; whether the departure of BAE affected the bid; and if he will make a statement; [125508]

(3) when the Government was first informed about BAE Systems' plan to hand its share of the Paradigm joint venture in Skynet 5 to the European Aeronautic Defence and Space group; how it was informed; how his Department was consulted about the transfer of Paradigm to EADS before the deal was made; and what the substance of such meetings was. [125507]

Mr. Ingram: The preferred bidder for Skynet 5 was selected because it offered the best value for money. The departure of BAES had no direct affect on the bid from Paradigm.

Paradigm informed the Ministry of Defence of the restructuring of its shareholding in January this year. A series of meetings took place between industry representatives and senior MOD officials to ensure that there was no adverse affect to Skynet 5.

The arrangements required to conclude the Skynet 5 deal are in the final stage. We expect to place the contract in the next few weeks.

Smart Acquisition

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what savings have been achieved through the Smart Acquisition initiative; and what the largest single saving is that has been achieved. [125611]

Mr. Ingram: Smart Acquisition is an integral part of Ministry of Defence business and it is no longer possible to attribute savings directly to Smart Acquisition.

Sonar 2087 Systems

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answers of 25 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 885W, and 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 46W, if he will name the ships to be fitted with the ordered Sonar 2087 systems; what his plans are for those which are not; and if he will make a statement. [124149]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on 10 February 2003, *Official Report*, column 516W, 12 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 47W, and 13 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 159W, to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis). I have nothing further to add to those answers.

Submarine Threat

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his assessment is of the threat to UK forces from hostile submarine forces; and if he will make a statement. [125591]

Mr. Ingram: The capability to operate submarines remains a weapon system of choice for many potentially hostile nations. The potential threat to United Kingdom forces ranges from strategic missile submarines, through the nuclear or conventional submarine threats in open ocean, to the threat from smaller coastal vessels or mini-subs in littoral waters. The submarine threat is kept under constant review and the UK maintains an Anti-Submarine Warfare capability for both offensive and defensive operations.

Aircraft Armament

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the *(a)* Typhoon and *(b)* Joint Strike Fighter will be armed with a gun. [125613]

Mr. Ingram: We currently have no requirement for either Typhoon or Joint Strike Fighter to be armed with a gun.

Violent Conflict

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department's estimate is of the number of people affected by violent conflict in *(a)* 2003 and *(b)* 2002; and whether he expects to meet his Department's Public Service Agreement in respect of this point. [125610]

Mr. Ingram: The Public Service Agreement (PSA) covering this issue is shared between Department for International Development, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence to reflect the Government's closely coordinated approach to improving the United Kingdom's contribution to reducing conflict overseas through the Conflict Prevention Pools for sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the world. The information sources we use to derive the number of people affected by violent conflict (the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the Journal of Peace Research, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, UN High Commission for Refugees and the United States Committee for Refugees) report annually and cover the figures collated for the previous year. Therefore, we do not expect to have the details for last year before the end of 2003 and the figures for this year before the end of 2004. Overall assessment of progress will be based on the data, but will also take account of factors beyond UK control, either in-country or within the wider international system.

The UK is beginning to make an impact in meeting the PSA targets. Examples of important initiatives include our post-conflict reconstruction work in Afghanistan and the Balkans, our political support to the Middle East Peace Process, our direct assistance to Sierra Leone and our support to African-led peacekeeping missions in general. UK efforts through the Pools to reduce the risk of conflict also include programme and project activities further afield, such as in Sri Lanka and Indonesia. We will continue to evaluate progress and improve the effectiveness of the Pools over the coming years.

Warships (NATO Commitment)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the UK commitment is to NATO forces in terms of *(a)* frigates and *(b)* destroyers. [126097]

Mr. Ingram: All of the Royal Navy destroyers and frigates are available to NATO for the full range of alliance missions and make a significant contribution to NATO's standing naval forces.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Arson Attacks

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what efforts are being made *(a)* by his Department and *(b)* by his Department in conjunction with other Departments to protect schools from arson attacks. [126050]

Mr. Miliband: My Department has produced the guide Fire Safety, which includes advice on how to reduce the risks of arson attacks. This complements our guidance on reducing crime in schools, such as the booklet Improving Security in Schools and the video Can You See What They See? A school security website has been established—www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolsecurity.

Officials from my Department sit on the Arson in Schools Working Group, a group of experts representing the insurance industry, the fire and police services, local authorities and Government departments. One of its outputs has been the publication of the guide How to Combat Arson in Schools, which is available free and has been well received by schools.

Disabled People

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to *(a)* encourage and *(b)* support more people with disabilities to enter (i) teaching and (ii) other employment in education; and what discussions he has had with Scottish counterparts on this issue. [125670]

Mr. Miliband: The Teacher Training Agency (TTA), acting on this Department's behalf, has implemented a number of measures to encourage more people with disabilities to enter teaching and support them throughout the process. Funding has been agreed with SKILL, the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, as a contribution towards updating their Into Teaching' publication which is due to be completed by 31 August 2003. The new TTA recruitment brochure will also highlight people with disabilities as a priority group that will be addressed in the content.

The TTA is also leading the work on behalf of the Department to produce guidance to support Initial Teacher Training providers in meeting their legal responsibilities in accommodating and supporting trainees with disabilities.

In the wider context of other employment in education, Disability Employment Advisers and other advisers in Jobcentre Plus offices are available to provide help and practical support to people with disabilities.

In the wider context of other employment in education, Disability Employment Advisers and other advisers in Jobcentre Plus offices are available to provide help and practical support to people with disabilities.

There have been no particular discussions on this subject with the Scottish Executive.

Domestic Violence

Ms. Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what services will be provided for children who are in families where there has been domestic violence. [125473]

Margaret Hodge: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy).

European Credit Transfer System

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he has taken to ensure that English universities are prepared for the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System; and if he will make a statement. [124640]

Alan Johnson: We are keen to see widespread use of credit in England and effective systems for recognising credits across Europe. To this end, we have commissioned the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to work with key partners in Higher Education, to develop credit practice. Part of this work is to raise the awareness of institutions of the European Credit Transfer System and to encourage developments that both support students and promote compatibility between systems.

Higher Education Funding

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much has been allocated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England to higher education institutions in their block grants to recognise the additional costs of recruiting and supporting students from disadvantaged or non-traditional backgrounds in each year since 1997; if he will express this as a proportion of the Higher Education Funding Council for England budget; and what projections there are for such support in future years, expressed both as *(a)* funding sums and *(b)* a proportion of the HEFCE budget. [125543]

Alan Johnson: The table shows the funding the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has allocated for widening participation measures since 1999/2000 and the percentage this is of the total HEFCE institutional allocation. No funds for widening participation were allocated as part of block grant in 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	Widening participation funding (£)	*Percentage of total HEFCE allocation*
1999/2000	19,874,648	0.5
2000/01	31,276,261	0.8
2001/02	37,016,630	0.9
2002/03	47,653,002	1.1
2003/04	260,501,27	3.5

The definition of widening participation and the funding method for determining its allocation has changed over this period so figures are not directly comparable. Institutions also receive funds for widening participation through the Excellence Challenge and Aim Higher programmes, but as these go directly to institutions they are excluded from the table. Some special funding is also allocated separately to higher education institutions for widening participation projects. This is also excluded from the table. For 2004/05 and 2005/6, the HEFCE funding as set out in the grant letter and the White paper "The future of Higher Education" will be £6,757,000,000 and £7,295,000,000 respectively. The allocation for widening participation in each of these years will be announced in February/March 2004 and 2005. This will reflect the outcome of the review of the HEFCE funding method, on which the sector will be consulted.

King's Ford Junior School

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will provide the hon. Member for Colchester with copies of the correspondence between himself and the Chair of Governors of King's Ford Junior School, Colchester *(a)* prior and *(b)* subsequent to his visit to Colchester. [125890]

Mr. Miliband: I am sending a copy of previous correspondence with officials to the hon. Member. There has been no correspondence with the Chair of Governors of King's Ford Junior School since the Secretary of State visited Colchester on 9 June.

Ofsted

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many lay inspectors are working for OFSTED in each region. [126118]

Mr. Miliband: This is a matter for Ofsted. HM Chief Inspector, David Bell, will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Overseas Students

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many non-British European Union students there were on *(a)* undergraduate and *(b)* postgraduate courses in English universities in each of the last 10 years; and what assessment he has made of the likely trend of applications following EU enlargement in 2004. [124641]

Alan Johnson: The available information is in the table.

Numbers of non-British European Union students on undergraduate and postgraduate courses in English HE Institutions and FE colleges

Academic year	*Undergraduate*	*Postgraduate*
1992/93	20,564	8,187
1993/94	25,187	9,757
1994/95	32,630	13,121
1995/96	42,903	16,614
1996/97	49,535	18,249
1997/98	55,689	19,676
1998/99	57,932	22,760
1999/2000	56,527	24,369
2000/01	54,211	26,316
2001/02	49,513	25,631

Projections of applicants to English institutions are not available centrally. The Department does, however, project the number of students, EU resident or otherwise, likely to attend English institutions.

The number of non-British, EU resident students[1] attending English institutions is projected to grow by 4 per cent. from 71,000 in 2003/04 to 74,000 in 2004/05 and then by a further 5 per cent. to 77,000 in 2005/06. These projections are based on a number of assumptions including our, estimates of the impact of EU enlargement and should be treated with caution. Detailed projections for later years are not available.

[1] On a headcount basis including full and part-time students on undergraduate and postgraduate courses

Overseas Teachers

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many overseas teachers have been working in English schools in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [125917]

(2) how many overseas teachers working in English schools have not had *(a)* qualified teacher status in England and *(b)* the equivalent of qualified teacher status in their home country in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [125918]

(3) how many overseas teachers working in English schools have been classified as instructors in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [125919]

(4) how many overseas teachers working in English schools have been classified as occasional teachers in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [125920]

Mr. Miliband: Information on numbers of teachers with overseas qualifications is not available.

School Funding

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much extra money his Department has provided to schools in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire to help ameliorate the effects of this year's school funding problems. [123914]

Mr. Miliband: The funding of schools in Chesham and Amersham is a matter for Buckinghamshire local education authority (LEA).

My Department has made available additional grant of £28 million in 2003–04 to ensure for all LEAs an effective increase of 3.2 per cent. per pupil after taking into account the ending of a range of Standards Fund grants this year. As Buckinghamshire local education authority's per pupil increase after the ending of the Standards Fund grants was 3.3 per cent., it did not receive additional grant.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how much funding was allocated to *(a)* Essex Local Education Authority and *(b)* other local education authorities for turbulence factors in respect of schools with a large number of children of military personnel in each of the last five years for which figures are available; [125894]

(2) what his policy is on providing additional funds for the turbulence factors at schools with a large number of children of military personnel; [125895]

(3) what plans he has to provide financial assistance for schools with a large number of children of military personnel. [125896]

Mr. Miliband: The Department for Education and Skills does not allocate any funding to any local education authority for the specific purposes of addressing turbulence for schools with large numbers of children of military personnel.

We recognise that turbulence in pupil numbers can have an impact on school budgets and pupil attainment. A local military presence is one cause, influxes of asylum seekers are another. Local authorities are able to include factors in their funding formulae to provide additional funding to take account of high turnover of pupils during the year. Essex local education authority has such a factor.

We believe further work on mobility should be done on the basis of data from the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) so that it is possible to consider in an informed way whether a mobility indicator might be included in the AEN part of the formula when the three-year formula freeze ends in 2006–07.

Specialist Subjects

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what mechanisms are in place to ensure that specialist school subject designations correlate to pupil and parent demand; and if he will make a statement. [125708]

Mr. Miliband: We are encouraging Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to work in partnership with all secondary schools to develop a strategy that enables individual schools to establish a specialism that plays to their strengths but also contributes to achieving a balance of specialisms in their area.

Many LEAs have drawn up plans with schools for a specialist system across the whole of their local area. The Government are encouraging this approach while recognising the final decision on the choice of specialist application lies with the individual school. LEAs adopting a more strategic approach include the Excellence in Cities authorities and the six Diversity Pathfinder LEAs.

Youth Services

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much each local authority spent on youth services in each year since 2000–01. [125325]

Mr. Miliband: The available information is contained in the following table:

Youth service expenditure since 2000–01

	2000–01	*2001–02*
Barking and Dagenham	1,004,168	951,453
Barnet	1,711,110	1,563,723
Barnsley	1,848,124	1,660,524
Bath and North East Somerset	1,388,823	1,271,942
Bedfordshire	1,437,528	1,743,509
Bexley	1,875,541	1,685,156
Birmingham	4,601,895	4,643,143
Blackburn	1,272,798	1,342,920
Blackpool	791,990	891,829
Bolton	1,572,393	1,588,801
Bournemouth	1,406,147	1,317,837
Bracknell Forest	970,383	751,465
Bradford	4,240,381	5,385,999
Brent	2,435,987	2,276,403
Brighton and Hove	813,268	811,565
Bromley	1,294,259	1,303,124
Buckinghamshire	2,740,507	2,460,200
Bury	1,416,707	1,196,770
Calderdale	2,236,617	2,423,087
Cambridgeshire	2,074,794	2,056,987
Camden	3,655,059	3,025,733
Cheshire	2,897,322	3,184,263
City of Bristol	2,890,887	2,950,182
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	2,624,304	2,710,114
Cornwall	2,925,464	3,299,592
Coventry	2,696,493	3,094,050
Croydon	3,197,804	3,246,130
Cumbria	1,552,584	678,132
Darlington	453,050	510,188
Derby	1,891,361	1,890,379
Derbyshire	3,800,688	4,347,357
Devon	2,741,698	2,801,103
Doncaster	1,942,685	2,150,565
Dorset	2,414,175	2,662,039
Dudley	2,049,271	1,756,525
Durham	2,157,733	1,543,994
Ealing	1,850,835	1,783,287
East Riding of Yorkshire	1,346,654	1,580,381
East Sussex	1,962,009	2,311,157
Enfield	1,062,935	966,509
Essex	6,748,926	6,567,980
Gateshead	1,205,334	1,001,050
Gloucestershire	3,088,459	3,136,081
Greenwich	2,810,581	2,826,400
Hackney	0	14,691
Halton	969,777	1,049,166
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,558,078	942,540
Hampshire	4,355,857	4,538,385
Haringey	1,732,980	1,953,319
Harrow	907,237	869,559
Hartlepool	900,972	1,003,576
Havering	1,560,814	1,718,958
Herefordshire	909,417	905,443
Hertfordshire	6,237,936	6,303,750
Hillingdon	1,630,052	1,667,618
Hounslow	896,713	963,371
Isle of Wight Council	997,135	1,120,183
Islington	4,226,725	4,349,353
Kensington and Chelsea	4,166,640	3,971,120
Kent	5,918,603	5,117,151
Kingston upon Thames	736,108	825,791
Kirklees	1,746,776	1,929,071
Knowsley	105,922	98,628
Lambeth	2,495,281	3,471,813
Lancashire	7,520,246	7,045,899
Leeds	8,445,009	7,719,800
Leicester	2,131,502	2,311,692
Leicestershire	3,745,260	3,878,072
Lewisham	2,743,783	2,947,715
Lincolnshire	2,571,578	2,335,680
Liverpool	6,264,669	6,057,000
Luton	1,299,964	1,336,332
Manchester	3,438,625	3,331,400
Merton	709,817	646,882
Middlesbrough	1,234,314	1,339,188
Milton Keynes	1,704,881	1,811,902
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,954,944	2,962,865

Youth service expenditure since 2000–01

	2000–01	2001–02
Newham	1,922,135	2,718,218
Norfolk	2,893,412	2,914,054
North East Lincolnshire	1,185,796	1,397,717
North Lincolnshire	1,157,216	1,197,615
North Somerset	798,774	877,540
North Tyneside	866,590	849,253
North Yorkshire	1,604,374	1,619,990
Northamptonshire	3,226,816	4,033,887
Northumberland	1,548,555	2,228,413
Nottingham City	3,505,811	3,211,865
Nottinghamshire	5,812,259	5,966,931
Oldham	1,529,279	2,287,924
Oxfordshire	2,735,893	2,750,677
Peterborough	1,100,072	1,094,891
Plymouth	1,184,230	1,281,571
Poole	864,089	1,016,433
Portsmouth	0	1,072,437
Reading	1,287,364	1,589,441
Redbridge	1,903,828	1,910,967
Redcar and Cleveland	1,330,912	1,367,091
Richmond upon Thames	794,625	665,184
Rochdale	1,426,181	1,578,086
Rochester and Gillingham	1,241,847	944,862
Rotherham	4,000,372	3,908,697
Rutland	234,204	228,495
Salford	1,700,511	1,538,565
Sandwell	1,748,886	1,745,341
Sefton	1,957,058	1,643,118
Sheffield	4,582,827	4,650,775
Shropshire	1,667,141	1,718,668
Slough	1,018,177	905,080
Solihull	730,374	723,658
Somerset	3,368,864	3,022,907
South Gloucestershire	1,138,615	1,442,166
South Tyneside	1,662,195	1,883,338
Southampton	932,178	1,110,462
Southend	812,929	927,968
Southwark	3,360,149	3,158,763
St. Helens	1,235,685	905,922
Staffordshire	6,077,732	6,139,629
Stockport	1,829,561	2 046,957
Stockton-on-Tees	1,220,601	1,322,136
Stoke on Trent	1,848,684	1,804,635
Suffolk	2,723,338	2,375,006
Sunderland	1,657,684	2,641,825
Surrey	6,866,364	6,206,392
Sutton	1,225,428	1,204,340
Swindon	1,249,685	1,622,018
Tameside	2,524,578	2,331,479
TheWrekin	1,291,391	1,156,873
Thurrock	1,235,653	1,077,862
Torbay	412,638	435,969
Tower Hamlets	4,172,061	4,039,740
Trafford	1,434,075	1,514,899
Wakefield	1,956,117	1,963,617
Walsall	1,361,374	1,393,789
Waltham Forest	2,263,444	1,840,419
Wandsworth	2,865,692	2,790,230
Warrington	867,377	918,272
Warwickshire	2,110,669	2,559,567
West Berkshire	834,811	968,020
West Sussex	4,013,460	4,233,300
Westminster	1,737,223	2,083,638
Wigan	1,524,468	1,550,440
Wiltshire	2,069,299	2,134,079
Windsor and Maidenhead	654,589	910,624
Wirral	2,286,654	2,343,046
Wokingham	160,809	199,241
Wolverhampton	3,753,824	3,683,860
Worcestershire	1,910,568	2,219,056
York	1,142,190	1,155,742

Note:

1. Youth Service figures shown are Net Current Expenditure (after recharges) and includes expenditure within schools and also that incurred centrally by LEAs.
2. Youth Service figures include provision at residential and non-residential youth centres, including activity, outdoor and urban studies centres related to Youth Service provision. Also development workers, advisers and youth leaders not based at youth centres.
3. Real term figures have been used are adjusted to 2002–03 prices using the June 2003 GDP deflators.
4. Nil returns were submitted by Hackney and Portsmouth for 2000–01.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Contingency Planning

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment the Office has made of the adequacy of current civil contingency planning; what plans there are to make changes; and if he will make a statement. [126816]

Mr. Alexander: Direct assessment of emergency planning at the local level is carried out through bodies such as the Audit Commission and the emergency services' inspectorates, as part of their wider assessment role.

The draft Civil Contingencies Bill proposes that these bodies, and others such as the utility regulators, will continue to assess civil protection duties in the future, to a more rigorous standard, supported by appropriate regulations and guidance which will set out clear standards and expectations.

At central Government level, the Government are formalising standards and guidelines against which departmental contingency planning activities can be monitored and audited, to ensure that Departments' planning and preparation is performed to the high standard expected by Parliament and the public.

Ministerial Responsibilities

Linda Perham: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he will publish an updated "List of Ministerial Responsibilities". [126074]

Harry Cohen: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when the latest "List of Ministerial Responsibilities" will be published. [126124]

Mr. Alexander: I am today pleased to announce the publication of the "List of Ministerial Responsibilities". For the first time ever, it is being published in both paper and electronic form. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

For the electronic version, the website can be accessed at: http://www.knowledgenetwork.gov.uk/elmr/minister.nsf

Private Office Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the running costs of Ministers' private offices have been in his Department in each year since 1997. [123114]

Mr. Alexander: The running costs of Ministers' private offices, the Cabinet Office parliamentary branch and the ministerial correspondence and support team for each financial year from May 1997 to 2002–03 are set out in the table.

Financial year	Number of private offices	Total net running costs (£)
May 1997–98	3	1,173,014
1998–99	3	1,368,862
1999–2000	4	1,465,634
2000–01	4	1,877,053
2001–02	6	2,173,436
2002–03	3	1,429,560

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Computer Security

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission (1) whether the House of Commons Commission plans to comply with UK Security Standard BS7799, relating to computer security, by the end of 2003; [126584]

(2) what *(a)* technical and *(b)* procedural security counter-measures are in place to protect PDVN users' data and e-mails from unauthorised internal or external interception while users are working (i) on the Parliamentary Estate and (ii) remotely. [126586]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Security of Members' e-mails and data is important; measures are in place to ensure that users working remotely and on the Parliamentary Estate are protected. As a matter of policy, the Commission does not comment on the details of parliamentary security arrangements. However, I can say that there is a parliamentary IT security policy for information technology and systems and that work is in hand to ensure that this policy keeps pace with developments in current best practice. We have no plans at present to seek accreditation to BS7799, but the philosophy and best practice elements within the standard form an important part of our approach.

All users of the network are subject to conventional password controls, which in turn, govern file rights and system permissions to prevent unauthorised access internally. For users on the Estate, the protection of corporate firewalls and anti-virus software prevents unauthorised external access. For remote users, the introduction of data encryption, personal firewalls and anti-virus software with the new Virtual Private Network (VPN) service hosted on known parliamentary-issued personal computers will minimise the risk of unauthorised access and interception. Members and their staff using equipment other than that provided or purchased centrally are responsible for their own arrangements.

Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what timbers are being used in the Houses of Parliament ticket office that is currently being constructed; which countries these were sourced from; and what evidence has been received to confirm that all the timber being used is from legal and sustainable sources. [126026]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The softwood timber used in the construction of the new ticket office is mainly spruce and originates in either Bavaria or Finland. The contractor has confirmed that it has been harvested from sustainable sources and is covered by either the Pan-European Forest Certification scheme (PEFC) or the Forestry Stewardship Council certification (FSC), or both. Certificates are being provided; copies will be sent to the hon. Member.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Armed Forces (Recruitment)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister for Women what plans she has for increasing the recruitment of women into the armed forces; and what discussions she has held with ministerial colleagues on the issue. [125979]

Ms Hewitt: From April 2002 to March 2003, 3,230 new women recruits joined the armed forces, an increase of 20 per cent. on the previous year. The Services' recruiting force actively encourage women to apply for the wide range of posts available to them.

Domestic Violence

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for Women pursuant to her answer of 25 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 143W, on domestic violence, if she will place in the Library copies of her correspondence with the Home Secretary regarding the collection of domestic violence statistics. [125686]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* No. The correspondence relates to the analysis of policy options that are currently the subject of consultation following the publication of the "Safety and Justice" domestic violence consultation paper on 18 June 2003. It is therefore covered by Exemption 2 (Internal Advice and Discussion) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General how many staff are employed by her Department. [106287]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 3 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 780W.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Leader of the House when he expects to answer the question of 24 February 2003 from the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire on IT contracts in his Department above £50 million. [126902]

Mr. Hain: The question to which the hon. Member refers was not tabled to me as Leader of the House of Commons. I therefore regret that I am unable to answer his question.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

A400M

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) pursuant to her answer of 24 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 677–78W, on A400M, if she will place in the Library the letter of intent to Rolls-Royce dated 4 May 2003; [126039]

(2) whether she has agreed the size of the grant to be provided to Rolls-Royce; and under which scheme the support will be delivered. [126055]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry wrote to Rolls-Royce on the 4 May 2003 regarding the engine selection for the A400M military transport aircraft. However, the content of this letter is commercially sensitive under Exemption 13—Third Party's Commercial Confidence's of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information and it cannot be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the financial impact on the UK insurance and reinsurance industries of the United States Fairness in Asbestos Injury Resolution Act of 2002; and if she will make a statement. [125830]

Mr. Browne: I have been asked to reply.

We are aware of the United States Fairness in Asbestos Injury Resolution Act of 2003 in the context of maintaining information on employers' liability and asbestos, but we have not undertaken a formal assessment of the Act. We will continue to keep abreast of developments in this area.

Burma

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), of 25 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 393–94W, on Burma, if she will provide figures for 2003 to date. [126634]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: According to figures published by HM Customs and Excise, UK imports of goods from Burma for January to May 2003, the latest period for which data are available, were as follows:

Imports of goods from Burma, January to May 2003

Product	*Amount (£000)*
Fish, (not marine mammals), crustaceans, molluscs and aquatic invertebrates and preparations thereof	3,022
Vegetables and fruit	106
Tobacco and tobacco manufactures	1
Cork and wood	365
Cork and wood manufactures (excluding furniture)	996
Textile yarn, fabrics, made-up articles, nes	52
Non-metallic mineral manufactures	3
Manufactures of metal nes	2
Power generating machinery and equipment	915
Transport equipment other than road vehicles	7
Furniture and parts thereof; bedding, mattresses, supports, cushions and similar stuffed furnishings	521
Articles of apparel and clothing accessories	15,815
Footwear	14
Miscellaneous manufactured article nes	70
Commodities and transactions not elsewhere classified	43
Total	21,934

Notes:
nes = not elsewhere specified. Products are classified according to the Standard International Trade Classification (Revision 2)

Business Support

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the future of Business Support. [126698]

Ms Hewitt: The DTI invests around £1 billion a year in supporting businesses—of that sum between £400 and £500 million is spent on business support schemes. Our aim is to use this money in a way that ensures the best possible return on that investment for the UK and makes a real difference to business performance.

Excellent progress has been achieved in the radical restructuring of the DTI's business support to create products that promote enterprise and innovation and meet customer need for a streamlined range of products that are easy to access.

As a result of the review we are reducing the number of schemes from over 100 to around 10. These new products are broader, more flexible and better targeted at the needs of our business customers than those they replace. We are carefully planning a transition from the old schemes to the new products.

Four new products have already been launched and are being used by customers. The Small Firms Loan Guarantee builds on the success of its predecessor and the new scheme is expected to increase take-up by around 25 per cent. At the beginning of June three more products designed to help small businesses develop innovative products and processes were launched.

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These are:

Grant for Research and Development, building on and extending the SMART scheme;

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, based on the Teaching Company Scheme, and

Grant for Investigating an Innovative Idea.

We are currently working on the next tranche of new products for launch next April. That work includes drawing up detailed marketing plans and training staff to provide the best possible advice to businesses about accessing the products. We are also working closely with the Business Link network to ensure that they have everything they need to support the delivery of our new products and to act as a point of access for information about DTI business support.

The new products support:

1. Knowledge Networks
2. Collaborative Research and Development
3. Best Practice Networks
4. Implementing Best Practice
5. Regional Capital Investment.

We are currently consulting on a sixth product to support small business investment companies.

In the development of these products I have been advised by an expert Investment Committee that includes independent business members. In future the Committee will not only endorse the business cases for new products but also review the impact of existing products.

The changes described above represent a major and forward-looking improvement in the provision of business support. However they are just one element of the reshaping of the DTI. In September I will publish a new Strategy for the Department that will tighten the focus on our key policies and set the scene for better services, more professionally delivered.

This new Strategy and the Business Support Transformation are being informed by the current Innovation Review which I announced on 27 November 2002. I asked the Review Team to make proposals to boost the nation's innovation capability and the exploitation of our creative science and engineering base. Initial findings suggest three key areas for action: a stronger national focus on exploiting our world-class science base; building and strengthening regional innovation activity; and using other government activities—in particular public procurement—to stimulate innovation.

I intend to publish the results of the Innovation Review this autumn.

China

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the value of British-owned manufacturing was in China in 2002. [126435]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The latest available UK outward Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) stock for manufacturing in Mainland China from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is £938 million for the end of 2001.

The equivalent FDI stock figure for Hong Kong (which is not included in the Mainland China stock) is £697 million for the end of 2001.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received regarding British trade with China. [126580]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Trade Partners UK regularly receives requests for advice and information from companies about China.

We also regularly receive ministerial and official Chinese trade delegations with whom we explore our bilateral trade relations. I will be heading a high-powered business delegation to Beijing and Shanghai from 20 to 22 July.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what tariffs or other import and export levies are enforced *(a)* by Britain on Chinese goods and *(b)* by China on British goods. [126436]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Under the Common Customs Tariff of the European Communities the range of import duties imposed on goods entering into the UK varies from 0 per cent. to 26 per cent. on non-agricultural products and up to 74.9 per cent. on agricultural products. There are also specific (non ad valorem) duties on some agricultural products. These rates apply to China except when it benefits under the Generalised System of Preferences. A list of the specific rates is available at the European Community's website www.europa.eu.int/comm/taxation_customs/databases/database.htm.

The UK's implementation of the European Community's external trade policy includes trade defence measures taken against China. A complete listing of the European Community's anti-dumping and anti-subsidy measures against China is available from the European Community's website at www.europa.eu.int/comm/trade/policy/dumping/stats.htm.

With regard to China's tariffs and levies on UK goods, China is a member of the World Trade Organisation and as such treats UK imports on a Most Favoured Nation (MFN) basis. Import duties levied on British goods vary from 0 per cent. to 32 per cent. and, exceptionally, up to 52.4 per cent. on crude oil and farm product based oils. Substantial tariff cuts are being made as part of China's WTO accession agreement. Average tariffs now stand at 11 per cent., down from 12.2 per cent. last year and 15.3 per cent. at the time of accession.

China/Japan

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the volume of trade between the UK and *(a)* China and *(b)* Japan was in 2002, broken down by (i) imports and (ii) exports; and what percentage of total UK trade volumes trade with (A) China and (B) Japan accounted for in 2002. [126543]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Information on UK trade in goods with individual countries is not available in volume terms. The value of UK trade in goods with China and Japan in 2002, along with their share of total UK trade was as follows:

	Value of trade (£ billion)		Share of total (Percentage)	
	China	Japan	China	Japan
UK imports	6.7	8.2	2.9	3.5
UK exports	1.5	3.6	0.8	1.9

Source:
Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics, Office for National Statistics

Coal Investment Aid

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications have been received in respect of Coal Investment Aid; from which companies the applications were received; how many applications have been successful; and what aid was awarded in respect of each of the applications. [126726]

Mr. Timms: The deadline for applications for support under the first period of Coal Investment Aid is 31 July 2003. The details supplied at Section 9 of each application received, which includes the name of the applicant, a description of the project and the amount of money applied for, will be posted on the website—www.dti.uk/energy/coal/invest_aid—in early August. This information will be updated in due course to indicate which applications have been successful and what aid has been awarded. One application has been received to date.

Consultation Documents

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the consultation documents issued by her Department in each of the last four years; what the cost was of producing each of these; how many documents were issued in each consultation; and how many responses were received in each consultation. [124565]

Ms Hewitt: The Government recommend that policy development should be done in close consultation with stakeholders. Formal consultation documents are only one part of this process, which includes:

Stakeholder meetings

Listening events/public meetings

Web forums

Public surveys

Focus groups

Regional events

Free-phone and freepost surveys and events

Targeted leaflet campaigns

Road shows and exhibitions.

It is standard practice for Departments to evaluate the policy development process, including the use of consultation. The specific information requested is not collated on a central basis and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, consultation exercises run by the Department of Trade and Industry since the Code of Practice came into force in January 2001, have been published on the Department of Trade and Industry website.

Consumer Credit Act

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to publish the results of the recent consultation on the licensing regime under the Consumer Credit Act 1974. [126264]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Reforming the licensing regime of the Consumer Credit Act is a key element of my review of that Act. I anticipate that I will be making an announcement very shortly on how I intend to reform the regulation of consumer credit including those aspects of the regulations that relate to the licensing regime.

Correspondence

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Minister with responsibility for competitiveness and e-commerce will reply to the letter dated 21 May from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan on the Competition Commission inquiry into veterinary-prescription only medicines. [126775]

Mr. Sutcliffe: I responded to the letter dated 21 May from the hon. Member on 30 June 2003.

Crossrail

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the impact on businesses in London and the south-east of *(a)* a decision not to go ahead with the Crossrail project and *(b)* the delays which have been experienced to that project; and if she will make a statement. [124735]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The business case proposals for the east-west Crossrail project, which have been submitted to the Department by Cross London Rail Links (CLRL), include an appraisal of the impact of a decision to go ahead against a wide range of criteria, including the economy. This is an extremely complex issue, which is the subject of continuing discussions between CLRL and the Government.

We are not aware of any estimates of the impact of the delay caused by the failure to secure parliamentary approval for a private Bill, deposited in November 1991, which had sought powers to build an earlier version of the scheme.

Energy Imports

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry where the gas delivered to the UK will come from in *(a)* 2005, *(b)* 2010 and *(c)* 2015; and what percentage of the gas will be delivered from each location. [125578]

Mr. Timms: Future gas supplies to the UK will be a commercial matter for energy companies in the competitive marketplace.

The most recent view of the future gas supply demand balance anticipates that the UK will again become a net gas importer (on an annual basis) after 2005. We have already depended on imported gas in some winter

quarters. It is anticipated that the UK will remain self-sufficient until 2005, with our import dependency expected to rise to around 50 per cent. in 2010 and 80 per cent. in 2015.

The UK already receives imports from Norway, and there are active treaty discussions with Norway that would facilitate further imports. A proposed gas interconnector from the Netherlands would enable gas from there to be supplied to the UK. In the longer term, British suppliers may contract for pipeline gas from Russia, from other former Soviet Union countries, from Middle Eastern suppliers such as Iran, and from elsewhere.

The Energy White Paper noted that expansion of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) market would contribute to diversity and security and would provide competition to piped gas. There are three active projects considering LNG imports to the UK. One aims to bring LNG from Qatar; the other two have not yet publicly committed to particular sources of gas. LNG imports could come from a variety of Atlantic Basin or Middle East sources. Some of the closest include Algeria, Egypt and Nigeria—countries all with significant LNG expansion plans.

The Energy White Paper also sets out our strategy for encouraging the development of a competitive international market place, and for monitoring developments affecting the reliability of energy supplies.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contingency plans she will put in place to ensure that energy is delivered to households in the UK in the event that future foreign gas supplies are interrupted. [125580]

Mr. Timms: The Government are committed to attracting diverse and reliable future sources of gas supply to the UK.

In the event of gas shortage, Transco, the operators of the national gas transmission system, have well-established procedures. These procedures are designed to ensure that domestic supplies are taken off only as a last resort.

These plans are tested regularly and, under the auspices of the Gas Industry Emergency Committee, they are reviewed continually to ensure that they take account of changes in the market and infrastructure.

Copies of the plans are available in the Libraries of the House.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the regulatory impact assessments her Department has carried out on measures to protect the environment since January 2002; and which of these have included an assessment of the economic benefits to environmental industries of the markets created by environmental protection measures. [125534]

Ms Hewitt: Seven such regulatory impact assessments have been carried out by the Department since January 2002. These related to the negotiation and implementation of the End of Life Vehicles Directive, the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive, the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive, and the Restriction on the Use of Certain Hazardous Substances in Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive. Each took account of the economic and environmental costs and benefits to all relevant sectors, including the environmental industries.

Global Poverty

Mr. Simon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action is planned to help deliver the Doha Development Agenda and reduce global poverty at the forthcoming WTO meeting in Cancun, Mexico. [126104]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It is important that the WTO Ministerial in Cancun makes progress on a range of issues across the Doha Development Agenda including—of most interest to developing countries—on agriculture; on an agreement on TRIPS and Public Health; and on a package of measures of Special and Differential Treatment.

Trade has an important role to play in reducing poverty. As an example, studies have shown that halving protection in agriculture, industrial goods and services around the world could boost developing country incomes by around $150 billion a year—around three times the level of current aid payments. Substantial trade liberalisation could reduce the number of people living in poverty by over 300 million by 2015—a significant contribution to reaching the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

International Atomic Energy Agency

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place a copy of the UK's presentation to the IAEA Board of Governors meeting for June in the Library; and if she will ensure that it is posted on the departmental website. [124741]

Nigel Griffiths: I am placing in the Libraries of the House a copy of the statement made by the UK Governor to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) at the IAEA Board of Governors' meeting, on 18 June 2003 in response to the IAEA Director General's report to the Board on the implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement in Iran. A copy of this statement is also available at http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/IAEA.pdf.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to require mobile telephone companies to cease the practice whereby individuals are permitted access to their services anonymously. [126895]

Mr. Timms: There are no plans to require mobile phone companies to change the arrangements they make with customers wishing to take out a pre-pay service.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many UK mobile users are registered with their networks with verifiable personal details. [126896]

Mr. Timms: This information is not available to the Department. It is a matter for the mobile phone companies.

Mine Shafts

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the progress made by the working group set up in her Department on mine shafts; and when the working group is expected to finalise its conclusions. [126379]

Mr. Timms: The Working Group has initiated and guided a range of measures aimed at ameliorating the impact of historic mineshafts, for example, work to establish the viability of non-invasive techniques for locating shafts in built environments and steps to encourage the reporting and treatment of shafts encountered in the course of building development. Other initiatives which will allow house owners and purchasers to take a more informed view on the significance of mineshafts will be launched later in the year. The Department will, in due course, consider when it would be sensible to wind the Group up and whether, at that time, to prepare a final report on its work.

New Electricity Trading Arrangements

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she has taken to help intermittent suppliers adversely affected by New Electricity Trading Arrangements. [126720]

Mr. Timms: There have been a number of refinements to NETA since its implementation in March 2001 that should have helped intermittent generators. These include:

Shorter gate closure, implemented in July 2002, has made it easier for all participants to manage their risks, particularly intermittent generators who should be better able to predict their output better one hour ahead of real time.

Recent changes to the Balancing and Settlement Code and National Grid's charging methodology were implemented to help smaller generators (many of which are intermittent) by unbundling so-called embedded benefits further. Embedded benefits are those benefits which accrue through not having to use the high voltage electricity transmission grid. These changes allow smaller generators to be paid these benefits directly from National Grid, rather than have to negotiate with electricity suppliers during contract rounds, which enables smaller generators to receive more of the embedded benefits that they create.

The Government have always been clear that they support Consolidation and changes which make it easier for larger suppliers to market power on behalf of smaller generators. This gives smaller generators an outlet for their supply, and larger generators have a wider portfolio of power.

The way in which energy imbalance prices in the Balancing mechanism are calculated was changed in March 2003 to make them more cost-reflective. This revised the definitions of the System Buy Price and the System Sell Price and has changed the way that National Grid calculates them. Early indications are that it has significantly reduced the spread of imbalance prices, which should be of particular benefit to intermittent generators. The spread of imbalance prices, which was around 20/MWh at the time of the introduction of NETA, was reduced to 0.6/MWh during the week commencing 7 July 2003.

Outside of NETA, there have also been further changes that have helped smaller generators. Last November the DTI and Ofgem launched a webportal, on the main Ofgem website, which contains comprehensive guidance for smaller generators to help them understand the market. The recent Energy White Paper further committed to making the administration procedures for the Balancing and Settlement Code more accessible to smaller generators to help them participate more effectively in the market.

In the Budget 2002 the Chancellor also announced the completion of the exemption of Good Quality CHP from the climate change levy, thus ensuring that Good Quality CHP used on site, sold direct and sold indirect will be exempt from the levy. The decision recognises the environmental benefits of all Good Quality CHP and has given the CHP sector, which has been hard hit recently by falling electricity prices and rising gas prices, a much needed boost. Finally, the Renewables Obligation was introduced in April 2002, which requires licensed suppliers to buy a specified proportion of their electricity from accredited renewables sources every year. Intermittent generators typically fall into this category and many of them have benefited considerably.

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the changes were in the export price of renewable energy generators *(a)* since the implementation of New Electricity Trading Arrangements and *(b)* in each year since 1997. [126721]

Mr. Timms: The export price of renewable electricity is subject to contract between generators and their customers. As such the export price is a matter of commercial confidence and the DTI does not have information on this.

Ofgem's report "The Review of the First Year of NETA", published in July 2002 contains some information on the export price of electricity, including a section on smaller generators and a survey of export prices for renewable energy in the first year of NETA (2001–02). This report can be found at: http://www.ofgem.gov.uk/temp/ofgem/cache/cmsattach/1984_48neta_year_review.pdf

Nuclear Industry

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many nuclear stations there are; and how many will continue beyond 2020. [125586]

Mr. Timms: From the last published company information on expected station lifetimes, three of the UK's 19 stations are expected to operate beyond 2020, with six already closed. These are:

Heysham 2—2023

Torness—2023

Sizewell B—2035.

Post Office Card Account

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set out the steps taken once an application for a Post Office Card Account has been received. [125835]

Mr. Timms: This is an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Post Offices

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices have fee-charging ATMs. [125270]

Mr. Timms: Decisions relating to ATMs are a commercial matter for Post Office Ltd. who tell me that of the 2,100 ATMs currently installed in post office branches, around 1,500 are fee charging.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will arrange for the Chief Executive of Post Office Ltd. to meet the hon. Member for Leicester, East to discuss post office closures. [125274]

Mr. Timms: I shall forward my hon. Friend's request to the Chief Executive of Post Office Ltd.

Print Cartridges

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will make a statement on the use of practices in the print cartridge manufacturing industry aimed at preventing the recycling of products; and what plans she has to regulate such practices; [126855]

(2) what estimate her Department has made of the proportion of toner cartridges which are remanufactured in the UK; what assessment she has made of the benefit this represents *(a)* to the environment and *(b)* in terms of lower imports; and if she will make a statement; 126856]

(3) what representations she has received from *(a)* printer cartridge manufacturers and importers and *(b)* printer cartridge remanufacturers on the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive; and what response she has made to these; [126857]

(4) what plans she has to require print cartridge manufacturers to remanufacture toner cartridges returned to them by consumers after use; [126929]

(5) what her policy is on the use of prebate schemes by the print cartridge manufacturing industry intended to discourage consumers from passing on cartridges to a third party. [126930]

Mr. Timms: The Department has received over 50 letters from the printer cartridge refilling industry, following a recent press article about the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive. They have written raising concerns that their operations might be put at risk if the WEEE Directive scope does not include these goods.

We have made clear in our replies that we take these concerns seriously and we are keen to see the cartridge refilling sector flourish. Officials are due to meet representatives from the UK Cartridge Recyclers Association to discuss these matters. They will also be seeing the original cartridge manufacturers shortly. So far the Department have received no written representations from manufacturers of printer cartridges on these issues.

Business estimates that, at the moment, around 30–40 per cent. of toner and inkjet cartridges are re-used or recycled. The Department has made no specific assessment of the environmental benefits of this activity or of its impact on imports.

The refill industry has raised concerns related to existing technology applied to some of the goods currently sold, which prevents re-use. However, the WEEE Directive does not affect this.

The European Commission has made clear that printer cartridges do not fall within the scope of the WEEE Directive, but considers that forthcoming EU legislation on eco-design may address the issues. The Government agrees with this assessment. In the meantime, if the spread of new technology in cartridges specifically to prevent their re-use beings to impinge significantly on the independent refill market, we would want to consider what additional action might be warranted. However the Department has no present plans to intervene in the market, either in relation to manufacturers' use of prebate schemes or to force them to remanufacture their own cartridges returned by consumers.

Any evidence of anti-competitive practices in the cartridge manufacturing industry would be a matter for the Office of Fair Trading.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much subsidy was paid by the Government to electricity generators as a result of their renewable energy policy *(a)* in total and *(b)* to generators using wood-fired power stations in (i) 2001 and (ii) 2002; what the payments are estimated to be in 2005; and if she will make a statement. [125112]

Mr. Timms: For 2001–02 and 2002–03, the Government paid the following amounts in support for research and development into renewable energy through the DTI's Renewable Energy Programme and through the Research Councils:

£ million

	(a) All renewables DTI R&D programme	*(b) Biomass Research Councils*	*DTI R&D programme*	*Research Councils*
2001–02	11.32	8.30	1.33	0.73
2002–03	16.69	[1]9.00	1.59	[1]0.79

[1] Estimates

Estimates for 2005 are not available. The figures show payments to all recipients: figures for payments to electricity generators are not readily available.

My Department and the New Opportunities Fund have set up a £66 million Bioenergy Capital Grants Programme. While grants from this programme have been announced, no payments relating to these have been made to date.

Other forms of support for renewable energy, such as the Renewables Obligation and the Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation, are not subsidies paid by Government.

Sellafield

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects the remediation of Sellafield building B30 to commence. [124834]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* BNFL has advised me that remediation within building B30 at Sellafield has been in progress since the pond ceased operations early in the last decade. Work to prepare for the acceleration of these operations is in progress. The Health and Safety Executive has given BNFL the requirement to retrieve and treat 90 per cent. of the sludges in B30 by 2010.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what volume of dried radioactive waste sludges she expects to be removed from building B30 at Sellafield in the post-operation clean-out process. [124835]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* BNFL has advised me that, because the amount of de-watering which will be needed to facilitate removal and treatment of these sludges has not yet been established, this volume cannot yet be accurately determined. However, BNFL currently expects it to amount to several hundred cubic metres.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the safety of the Magnox storage and decommissioning B30 facility at Sellafield. [124886]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* The B30 pond contains many tonnes of Magnox fuel and sludge from corrosion of the Magnox fuel cladding and the fuel. These must be removed and converted into forms suitable for long-term passively safe storage and eventual disposal, while minimising radiation doses to the work force and risk to the public. This decommissioning poses significant technical challenges.

I have been informed that as a result of the increased concern of the Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII) over the state of the plant and lack of progress in decommissioning, it served an Improvement Notice in July 2001 requiring BNFL to produce a decommissioning plan, programme and a project specification. NII further required BNFL to prepare a risk assessment of the failure of B30 structure and equipment. Following assessment of this report by NII, BNFL has now committed to a full structural analysis of the whole B30 facility, to be completed by June 2004. Additionally, NII requires BNFL to retrieve and treat 90 per cent. of the sludge from B30 by 2010. NII will be continually monitoring the programme and the technical work.

Copies of a report prepared by BNFL on the B30 facility were recently placed in the Libraries of the House.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what facility attachments and safeguards provisions apply to the B30 spent fuel and waste store at Sellafield; when Euratom safeguards inspectors last visited the B30 plant; what discussions her Department has had with the *(a)* Euratom Safeguards Directorate and *(b)* European Commission authorities on B30; and if she will make a statement on the application of safeguards at B30. [126522]

Mr. Timms: The B30 store at Sellafield is subject to regular Euratom safeguards inspections, the last one being in March of this year. Particular Safeguards Provisions (PSP) have been prepared by the European Commission for this part of the Sellafield facility but have yet to enter into force. A facility attachment would only be negotiated in the event the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) decided to designate B30 for inspection under the UK's safeguards agreement with the IAEA and Euratom.

The Department maintains close contact with both the European Commission's safeguards authorities and also BNFL across the range of issues that relate to safeguards arrangements at Sellafield. Definitive statements on such Euratom safeguards implementation as a whole are contained in recent reports on Euratom Safeguards operations as published by the European Commission. The Executive Summary to the most recent of these (on activities during 2001, published in October 2002) notes that

> 'verification activities conducted by Commission inspection staff led to the conclusion that, apart from some discrepancies between evaluations carried out by operators and Commission inspectors, which are in the process of being solved, no diversion of nuclear material from its intended use was established'.

This follows a similar conclusion, that the Commission

> 'did not find any indication that nuclear material had been diverted from its intended peaceful use'

in the corresponding report for 1999 2000.

Solar Energy

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the implications of a shortage of silicon for the solar cells industry; and if, pursuant to the letter of 30 May from the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), she will make a statement. [126267]

Mr. Timms: No assessment has been undertaken by the UK of the implications of a shortage of silicon for the solar cells industry, as the UK currently has no major silicon cell manufacturers. As my predecessor's letter of 30 May stated, multi-national cell manufacturers are monitoring the situation, and may build dedicated silicon production plants or diversify into non-silicon cell technologies if a prolonged shortage does arise.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance the Government has given to *(a)* households and *(b)* business in the installation of solar energy devices; and how many (i) households and (ii) businesses have installed solar energy devices in each year since 1997. [126658]

Mr. Timms: Government assistance for the installation of solar photovoltaic systems has been provided since 2000 through the Domestic (DFT) and Large-Scale Field Trials (LSFT), totalling £10 million. The DFT is supporting the installation of PV roofs on 30 projects throughout the UK, comprising some 500

homes in the social and private housing sectors. The LSFT is supporting 15 projects in public sector buildings, including universities, council offices and visitor centres. Since April 2002 grants have been provided through the £20 million first phase of the Major Photovoltaics Demonstration Programme (MDP). Under the MDP, grants totalling £10 million have so far been allocated to 300 individual householders and to 66 medium and large-scale projects with housing groups and on non-residential buildings, only a few of which are businesses.

For solar water heating systems grants have been available since March 2003 under my Department's £10 million Clear Skies Programme and the £3.7 million Scottish Community Renewables Initiative. So far, grants have been awarded to 230 individual households and to 14 of the 22 successful community schemes in the first call for proposals, giving a total of around £300,000 in grants for solar water heating systems. The Clear Skies programme is not open to businesses.

It is difficult to assemble accurate figures for the number of solar devices installed on an annual basis since 1997. However, an indication of the growth of the solar PV market in the UK shows the following trend:

Figures are for cumulative capacity in Megawatts:

1997: 0.6MW

1998: 0.7MW

1999: 1.1MW

2000: 1.9MW

2001: 2.7MW

2002: 4.1MW

For solar water heating it is estimated that between 3,000 and 5,000 domestic systems are installed each year. Current cumulative figures for the UK are estimated to be around 50,000 homes.

Trade Justice Movement

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what response she will make to the representations from the Trade Justice Movement on trade with poorer countries; and what plans she has to raise these issues at the next meeting of the World Trade Organisation. [125680]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 14 July 2003]*: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry wrote to all members of the House, on 16 June, in response to the Trade Justice Movement campaign setting out the Government's support for trade to be free and fair and, in particular, the need for the WTO to address the concerns of developing countries.

My ministerial colleagues and I will continue to argue for an international trading system which benefits the world's poorest nations with WTO members from both developed and developing countries. It is vital that we make progress on implementing the Doha Development Agenda before, during and after the mid-Round Ministerial Conference in Cancun this September.

Wind Farms

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the development of wind power facilities in the United Kingdom. [126730]

Mr. Timms: I am encouraged by the number of new wind farm developments coming forward in the UK.

There is no requirement on developers to inform the Department of when a project will commence construction or when the completion date for construction will be. The Department therefore has no details of how many wind farms are under construction or when they will be completed. The DTI only collects data for wind farm applications above 50 MW (1 MW for offshore applications). Proposals for wind farms in England and Wales with a capacity of 50 MW or below fall to be determined by the local planning authority under the normal planning regime. The Government have made a commitment in the Energy White Paper to improve our statistics gathering for all planning applications regarding renewable energy, and we are presently working on this.

There is currently 995 MW of generation capacity in the application process and an additional 671 MW capacity has been given planning consent for wind farms in England and Wales, under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989.

Powers under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, as they apply to Scotland, have been devolved to the Scottish Executive. In Scotland there is currently 1,060 MW in the planning process and an additional 292 MW has received consent.

In Northern Ireland wind farms with a capacity of 10 MW or above fall to be determined by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for Northern Ireland under Article 39 of the Northern Ireland Electricity Order 1992. There is currently 115 MW in the application process and 62 MW have received consent and are commissioned.

The DTI announced on 14 July 2003 that it had asked the Crown Estate to invite applications for sites for offshore wind farm developments in three strategic areas around the coast—the Thames Estuary, the Greater Wash and the north-west (which covers the area of the Irish Sea from the north Wales coast to the Solway Firth). This invitation to developers is likely to lead to a significant increase in the number and capacity of offshore wind farms.

World Trade Organisation

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received regarding accession by China to the World Trade Organisation; and if she will make a statement. [126576]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The People's Republic of China joined the World Trade Organisation on 11 December 2001.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to take steps in the next round of WTO negotiations to improve access to patented drugs in the developing countries. [126375]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government consider it important to find a solution to the outstanding issue from Doha on TRIPS and public health at or before the forthcoming WTO Ministerial in Cancun in September. The issue centres on how countries with insufficient or no manufacturing capacity in the pharmaceutical sector can make effective use of the compulsory licensing provisions of the WTO TRIPS Agreement. We are therefore working with partners to secure a solution which will be acceptable to all participants.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to take steps in the next round of WTO negotiations to prevent subsidised EU products being dumped on developing countries. [126371]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: All WTO members are committed to negotiations aimed at reducing, with a view to phasing out, all forms of export subsidies and significantly reducing trade-distorting domestic support. I will be pushing for agreement on how to implement this and all other elements of the Doha mandate on agriculture at the next WTO Ministerial this September. As part of the WTO agriculture negotiations, the EU has already offered to reduce its trade distorting domestic support by 55 per cent. and export subsidies by 45 per cent. In addition it is pressing for proper controls on the use of food aid and export credits to prevent these being used as a form of export subsidy.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to take steps in the next round of WTO negotiations to protect sugar producers in developing countries from competition from subsidised sugar production in the EU. [126370]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: All WTO members are committed to negotiations aimed at reducing, with a view to phasing out, all forms of export subsidies. I will be pushing for agreement on how to implement this and all other elements of the Doha mandate on agriculture at the next WTO Ministerial this September. As part of the WTO agriculture negotiations, the EU has already offered to reduce its export subsidies by 45 per cent. In addition it is pressing for proper controls on the use of food aid and export credits to prevent these being used as a form of export subsidy.

The UK will also continue to press for early and radical reform of the EU sugar regime in line with other recent CAP reforms.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Ambition Construction Programme

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* annual budget and *(b)* total central Government funding was for the Ambition Construction Programme in each financial year since 2000–01. [126838]

Mr. Browne: Ambition:Construction began to operate in June 2002. It is not possible to provide figures for the annual budget for the programme because, in addition to central Government funding, the programme draws money from a range of other sources, including the Construction Industry Training Board, European Social Fund, Single Regeneration Budget and local employers in individual pilot locations.

Central Government funding for 2002–03 was £1,516,890. For the period April to September 2003, £3,394,600 of central Government funding has been allocated to the programme. Funding for the remainder of the year will be allocated following the mid-year review of expenditure carried out by Jobcentre Plus.

Benefit Entitlement (EU Citizens)

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what period has to elapse before EU citizens who remain in the UK under the habitual residency test can claim UK benefits. [126826]

Mr. Pond: EU citizens who are living in the United Kingdom are treated the same as United Kingdom citizens in respect of claims for income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit. However, the habitual residence test limits entitlement to these non-contributory benefits to people with genuine ties to the United Kingdom. There is no set timescale for satisfying the test and each case is considered on its own merits.

Child Support

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many families are expected *(a)* to gain and *(b)* to lose from the child support reforms, broken down by (i) couple families and (ii) families headed by a lone parent [99052]

Mr. Pond: The information is not available in the format requested. Our latest available estimates are in the tables below. It is estimated that 82 per cent. of maintenance liabilities calculated under the new scheme will be phased in over (up to) five years.

Earning non-resident parents (Per cent.)

	(i) Repartnered	*(ii) Single*	*Total*
(a) Gain	14	45	59
(b) Lose	18	21	39

In addition, a further 60 per cent. of non-resident parents on Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance will have an increased liability for maintenance. Of these, 9 per cent. have a new partner, and 91 per cent. do not.

Earning parents with care (Per cent.)

	(i) Repartnered	*(ii) Single*	*Total*
(a) Gain	11	44	55
(b) Lose	8	31	39

In addition, up to 90 per cent. of parents with care on benefit stand to gain by up to £10 a week through the introduction of the Child Maintenance Premium. Of these, 3 per cent. have a new partner and 97 per cent. do not.

Notes:
1. Figures are taken from 5 per cent. samples of all 'live and assessed' cases of quarterly scans of the Child Support Agency Computer System August 2001 and so are subject to sampling variation.
2. Figures are for Full Maintenance Assessments only.
3. Information relating to the non-resident parent and parent with care's status as repartnered or single is held only at time of case take-on, so this information may be out of date.
4. Totals may not sum exactly dues to rounding. There is also a small proportion of parents who will see no change in maintenance liability.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what research has been commissioned on the financial impact on absent fathers of the interaction between child support maintenance assessments and the new tax credits, with particular reference to *(a)* absent fathers who have new partners and *(b)* fathers who are registered as absent, but who look after their children for three nights per week. [126567]

Mr. Pond: No specific research has been commissioned on the interaction between new tax credits and child support. The introduction of new tax credits has been carefully reflected in the regulations governing child support. These are kept under regular review.

Gas Fitters

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on the compulsory registration of gas fitters according to the Corgi Standard; and how many complaints his Department has received in the last year over the action of unregistered gas fitters. [123498]

Mr. Browne: For many years health and safety legislation has required anyone carrying out work on gas appliances to be competent and registered with the Council for Registered Gas Installers (CORGI). This legislation is enforced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Over the last year my Department has received one complaint about unregistered gas fitters.

In addition, registered fitters and members of the public report fitters suspected of working illegally to CORGI. Where, on investigation, CORGI finds evidence of unregistered working, it will pass the information to HSE for further action. In the year 2002–03, CORGI reported details of 1,003 unregistered fitters to HSE. Complaints about unregistered fitters may also be made directly to HSE area offices, though HSE's current database does not enable these to be quantified separately from other gas-related complaints and reports.

HSE's policy is to follow up all gas-related complaints and reports that it receives, including those about unregistered fitters, and where appropriate take enforcement action.

Adult Education

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much funding his Department and its predecessors allocated to Work Based Learning for Adults in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [114473]

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the allocation to Work-based Learning for Adults was in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; and what the allocation will be in (i) 2003–04, (ii) 2004–05, (iii) 2005–06 and (iv) 2006–07. [116015]

Mr. Browne: Information on spend on the Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA) programme is in the following table:

	Spend (£ million)
1997–98	382
1998–99	264
1999–2000	264
2000–01	275
2001–02	168
2002–03	123

Sources:
DfEE and Ofsted Departmental Report and Main Estimates
DfEE Appropriation Accounts
Employment Service Annual Reports and Accounts

From 2003–04 a separate budget is no longer allocated for WBLA. Spend figures for 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06 will become available when Jobcentre Plus Annual Reports for each year are published.

It is not yet possible to confirm the position for 2006–07 as this is subject to outcomes from the 2004 Spending Review.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make it his policy to award a severely disabled person attendance allowance for the six-month qualifying period once it has been established that the conditions of entitlement have been met. [126369]

Maria Eagle: No. Attendance allowance provides a contribution towards the extra costs faced by severely disabled people as a result of long-term disability. The six-month qualifying period helps to establish that the disability, and the resulting personal care or supervision needs which give entitlement to the benefit, are of a long-term nature. However, special considerations apply to people who are terminally ill, and our arrangements recognise the particular difficulties faced by people who have only a short time to live. Such people are awarded attendance allowance automatically without having to complete a qualifying period. The arrangements ensure that claims are dealt with quickly and sensitively. We have no plans to extend this exception to attendance allowance claims generally.

Benefit Costs

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost per claimant was of administering each of the major benefits in the last 12 months. [125409]

Malcolm Wicks: Information is not available in the format requested. In accordance with the requirements of Resource Accounting and Budgeting the Department now accounts for its administration and benefit expenditure by strategic objective, as set out in its Public

Service Agreements (PSAs), and by individual requests for resources (RfRs) as set out in the Department's Estimates and Acco[illegible]

Benefit Errors

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have had *(a)* their state pension and *(b)* other benefits incorrectly deducted after a hospital stay lasting more than six weeks since 9 March. [126851]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available.

Benefit Fraud

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff are responsible for detection of benefit fraud, broken down by region; what change has been made in the level of such staff in the last six months, broken down by region; on what basis the decision was made to change staff levels; and if he will make a statement. [123041]

Mr. Pond: The overall aim of the Department's anti-fraud strategy is to have a benefit system which is secure from first claim to final payment. The implementation of this strategy means than an anti-fraud focus is integral to the work of all staff in the Department, as is dealing with the wider agenda of error and incorrectness in benefit payments.

The information currently available suggests that around 5,000 staff are employed at any one time by the Department and its agencies in work to investigate suspicions of fraud. Information on changes made in the level of such staff in the last six months is not available

Benefit/Pension Payments

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants in each benefit client group who have been sent direct payment invitation letters have opened *(a)* normal bank or building society accounts, *(b)* basic bank accounts and *(c)* Post Office Card Accounts. [123296]

Mr. Pond: Information is not available in the format requested.

I refer the hon. Member for Northavon to the table of latest key figures on the progress of conversion to Direct Payment placed in the Commons Library on 7 July 2003.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants in each benefit client group have been sent direct payment invitation letters; and for each of those groups how many have *(a)* opted for payment via a normal bank account or building society account, *(b)* opted for payment via a basic bank account, *(c)* opted for payment via a post office card account, *(d)* responded indicating that they wish to continue using order books and *(e)* not responded. [123322]

Mr. Pond: I refer the hon. Member to the table of latest key figures on the progress of conversion to direct payment placed in the Library on 7 July 2003.

In addition to these figures 26,488 customers have indicated that they do not wish to be paid by direct payment. Of these, 20,509 are child benefit customers, 350 are Veteran Agency customers, 3,783 are pension customers, and 1,846 are Jobcentre Plus customers. Those customers who are paid by order book will for the meantime continue to be paid this way. However, order books will eventually be phased out and we will need to make payment by another method.

So far, 821,713 customers have yet to respond. This consists of 503,456 child benefit customers, 11,360 Veterans Agency customers, 118,194 pension service customers, and 188,703 Jobcentre Plus customers.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many customers *(a)* will and *(b)* will not be paid by direct payment if the Department meets its public service agreement target to pay 85 per cent. of customers via bank accounts by 2005; and if he will make a statement; [124014]

(2) what his target is for the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of customers receiving benefits by direct payment by 31 December 2005; [124016]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 16 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 440W, and 20 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 753W, what method of payment his Department plans to use to pay the 15 per cent. of customers that may not be being paid by direct payment by the end of 2005, following the completion of the phasing out of order books by that date; and if he will make a statement. [124100]

Mr. Pond: The Department has a published Public Service Agreement that by 2005, 85 per cent. of customers will have their benefits paid by Direct Payment. Already 87 per cent. of all customers and 90 per cent. of pensioners have access to a bank account that can receive direct payment. We expect that more than 85 per cent. of customers will provide us with their bank account details or choose a Post Office card account. Everyone will be able to access their money at the Post Office if they wish just as they do now.

We have always recognised that there will be a small group of people who we cannot pay directly into an account. We will develop an alternative method to pay this group, which can be accessed at Post Office branches.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) whether customers who have more than one carer or a number of irregular carers will be able to nominate more than one such person to collect their benefit from the Post Office, following the transfer to direct payment; and if he will make a statement; [124017]

(2) pursuant to the statement made by the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) of 9 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 310WH, whether it is his policy that all pensioners and benefit recipients with more than one carer should be able to use the exceptions service; and if he will make a statement. [125961]

Mr. Pond *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* Customers will be supplied with information that clearly sets out their account options and will enable them to choose the account which best meets their needs and circumstances.

If they have more than one carer or a number of irregular carers customers may find that accounts that offer cheque books/building society passbooks provide more flexibility.

We are currently looking to find the best way to meet the needs of people who have no regular carer or helper. Where people need help to collect their money they will, for the meantime, be allowed to keep their order book.

We have always recognised that there will be a small group of people who we cannot pay directly into an account. We will develop an alternative method to pay this group, which can be accessed at Post Office branches.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have been contacted, following a failure to respond to an invitation to transfer to direct payment; and of those, what proportion responded to this further contact. [124019]

Mr. Pond: Information is not available in the format requested.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Coventry have converted to direct payment of their benefits and pensions. [125354]

Mr. Pond: The following table shows the breakdown of claimants in Coventry that have converted to direct payment of their benefits and pensions in the past six months.

	Number of claimants
January 2003-March 2003	843
April 2003-June 2003	1,371

Notes:

1. The above figures are payload not caseload figures therefore, a claimant may be counted more than once if they are on several benefits.

2. If a claimant is receiving one combined payment through the Income Support system for both MIG and RP they will only be shown on MIG and not on RP.

3. Data is only available on a monthly basis, with parliamentary constituency from December 2002.

4. Figures quoted are for Coventry North East, Coventry North West and Coventry South combined.

Source:

DWP Information Centre, Information and Analysis Directorate (100 per cent. data).

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 25 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 837W, on benefits, how many consolatory payments were made to customers for gross inconvenience or severe distress as a result of official errors; and what the *(a)* total and *(b)* average award was in each of the last 10 years. [126392]

Mr. Pond: The special payments scheme was revised in 1997 to introduce consolatory payments for inconvenience and distress. Information on payments made under the previous redress arrangements is not available.

The available information is in the tables.

Ex gratia consolatory payments made in respect of benefits 1997–98 to 1999–2000

	Total payments made	*Total amount paid*
1997–98	123	29,525
1998–99	302	80,544
1999–2000	693	82,637

Ex gratia consolatory payments made in respect of benefits 2000–01 to 2002–03

	Gross inconvenience		*Severe distress*	
	Total payments made	*Total amount paid*	*Total payments made*	*Total amount paid*
2000–01	714	64,474	161	23,983
2001–02	941	86,946	242	26,748
2002–03	1,048	89,069	175	18,870

Notes:

1. Consolatory payments were not recorded by category prior to 2000–01.

2. Payments in 2000–01 and preceding years were made by the former Benefits Agency and War Pensions Agency.

3. Payments in 2001–02 were made by the former Benefits Agency only following the transfer of War Pensions Agency (now the Veterans Agency) to the Ministry of Defence.

4. Payments in 2002–03 were made by Jobcentre Plus, The Pension Service and Disability and Carers Service.

5. Figures prior to 2002–03 do not include any payments for redress made by the former Employment Service.

6. As some customers will have received consolatory payments for both the inconvenience caused and the distress suffered, information on the average payment made to an individual is not available.

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidance he has issued to his Department regarding making benefit and pension payments to clients who fail to open a bank or Post Office card account and whose current order books have expired. [126276]

Mr. Pond: Around 87 per cent. of customers already have bank accounts. And for those who do not, new easy to operate accounts, which are accessible at the Post Office, are widely available. Those customers who have yet to respond to their invitation and whose current order books have expired will, for the meantime, continue to be paid by this method, until order books are eventually phased out in 2005.

We have always recognised that there will be a small group of people who we cannot pay directly into an account, and the Department is committed to developing an alternative method to pay this group.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which his Department cold-calls customers in connection with the transfer to direct payment; and in what circumstances his Department cold-calls customers to invite them to receive payment via bank accounts when they have already opted for a Post Office card account. [126811]

Mr. Pond: Initial contact with any customer is made either by letter, or in the case of some Jobcentre Plus customers, face-to-face as part of normal business.

There is no attempt to persuade customers away from the Post Office card account. Customers will be provided with information on all of their banking options. It is for the customer to decide on the best option to suit their needs.

Benefit Take-up

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much extra grant per year would need to be paid from central Government to local authorities if take-up of all income-related benefits was to be 100 per cent. assuming that current take-up rates are at the mid-point in the range of estimates provided by the Government. [126564]

Mr. Pond: We estimate that a 100 per cent. take-up of income related benefits in 2003-04 would increase centrally funded housing benefit and council tax benefit expenditure by £1.7 billion. Subsidy for local authorities to administer housing benefit and council tax benefit claims is distributed by the Department using a caseload based formula on a definitive sum. Any changes in caseload, or type of caseload, may affect the amount allocated to individual authorities, but not the overall allocation.

Notes:

1. Estimates are consistent with Budget 2003 estimates of 2003-04 Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB and CTB) expenditure.
2. The estimate of the increased funding is rounded to the nearest £100 million
3. Current take-up rates are mid-point 2000-01 estimates from "Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-Up in 2000-2001", published by DWP.
4. Centrally funded benefit expenditure is defined as all HB and CTB benefit expenditure not funded by local authorities.
5. Estimates are based on the assumption that local authorities would contribute the same proportion of HB and CTB benefit expenditure as at present.

Source:

DWP Information and Analysis Directorate, Benefit Forecasting

British Sign Language

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Government's recent discussions regarding the allocation of funding to support British Sign Language initiatives; and whether there was direct representation at these meetings by organisations from *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland. [126109]

Maria Eagle: The British Sign Language working group we have established considered priorities for allocating the additional £1 million funding at its first meeting on 2 July. Their work is on-going and we will receive recommendations in due course. In selecting organisations to be represented on the group, we have identified key organisations of and for deaf people with remits across Great Britain. They will ensure that initiatives progressed reflect needs across Great Britain including Scottish and Welsh interests. The situation in Northern Ireland is being considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what policies and procedures are being modified and what actions are being taken within his Department following the Government's decision to recognise British Sign Language as an official language. [126240]

Maria Eagle: The Department is chairing and supporting the BSL working group which was established following the statement on 18 March. We will use that forum, working with organisations of and for deaf people, to identify issues impacting on our capacity to perform as good practice service providers to sign language users and to develop strategies to improve access for deaf people who use BSL. We will then make appropriate modifications to policies and procedures.

Carers

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people aged over 65 are receiving *(a)* carer's allowance and *(b)* the carer's premium in income support; and how many people aged over 65 have claimed (i) carer's allowance and (ii) the carer's premium in income support since April 2003. [126562]

Maria Eagle: Information is not available in the form requested. The information that is available is in the tables.

Carer's allowance: number of claims made by people aged 65 and over in Great Britain in the period from 1 October 2002 to 28 February 2003, and the number of people aged 65 and over receiving the allowance at 28 February 2003

	Number
Claims for carer's allowance 1 October 2002 to 28 February 2003	21,705
In receipt of carer's allowance at 28 February 2003	6,630

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5.
2. Claims figures refer to the number of people making a claim. Each person may have made more than one claim.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 100 per cent. sample

Awards of carer premium to claimants and partners aged 65 and over, and numbers of claimants and partners aged 65 and over in receipt of carer premium—Great Britain

	Thousands
New awards of carer premium 1 November 2002 to February 2003	4.2
In receipt of carer premium as at	
November 2002	12.3
February 2003	17.1

Notes:

1. Based on a 5 per cent. sample of income support and carers allowance claimants, therefore subject to sampling variation.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred and expressed in thousands.
3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.
4. Based on any live income support benefit unit where a carer premium is in payment and either the claimant or partner are aged 65 and over and have entitlement to carer's allowance. Includes cases where CA is not actually paid due to overlapping benefit rules.
5. In receipt figures include some cases who claimed carer's allowance and carer premium before the age of 65.

6. New awards have been defined as people aged over 65 who were IS carer premium cases in February 2003 and were not IS carer premium cases in November 2002. Cases that were on IS in November and not getting carer premium but appear on the February 2003 scan with carer premium are included. However, figures exclude cases with an existing award of carer premium who reach 65.

7. This will undercount the number of in flows as those cases flowing on then off again between the scan dates will not be captured.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 5 per cent. sample.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether an allowance is made for child care costs, in relation to a child living with an absent parent with care or with the parent being assessed, in the Child Support Agency's formula for child maintenance. [126160]

Mr. Pond: In both the old and new child support schemes, no specific allowance is made for formal child care costs. In the old child support scheme, an allowance is made in the exempt income calculation for the non-resident parent's natural children who reside with them, and all the children who reside with them (including stepchildren) in the protected income calculation. In the new scheme, any children residing with the non-resident parent are taken into account before maintenance liability is calculated.

Allowance is also made for those non-resident parents who share the care of their children. In the old child support scheme, maintenance liability reduces if care is shared for 104 or more nights in a year. In the new scheme, reductions apply if care is shared for 52 nights or more. For equal care, there are special rules.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the progress made by the CSA in introducing the new system of assessment. [117902]

Mr. Pond: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North, (Malcolm Wicks), gave to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on 3 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 54W.

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many liability orders were placed on members of the armed forces by the Child Support Agency in each month since July 2002. [123931]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Doug Smith to Diana Organ, dated July 2003:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent parliamentary question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You ask how many liability orders were placed on members of the armed forces by the Child Support Agency in each month since July 2002.

We have not placed any liability orders on members of the armed forces. We have however made deduction of earnings requests in respect of members of the armed forces.

We do not have the information to provide a monthly breakdown. As at 28 February 2003 the Agency had made just under 3,000 deduction of earnings requests. I do not have the figures relating to periods after February 2003.

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the application of child support regulations to armed forces personnel. [123933]

Mr. Pond: Child support regulations are applied to civilians and armed forces personnel equally, other than the regulations concerning deductions from the pay of service personnel.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much interest was earned from monies held by the Child Support Agency between receipt from parents without care and payment to parents with care in the last year for which figures are available. [124975]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated July 2003:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent parliamentary question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You ask how much interest was saved from monies held by the Child Support Agency between receipt from parents without care and payments to parents with care in the last year for which figures are available.

Where an amount has been received from the non resident parent and has not been paid over to the parent with care within a 14 day period; any interest accrued during that time, in excess of £5, will be reimbursed to the parent with care. During the 2002–03 financial year this amounted to £20,803. I have no information on the interest relating to amounts paid over to the parent with care within the 14 days and the interest relating to amounts less than £5.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will apply the new rules for Child Support Agency claims to pre-existing cases. [125163]

Mr. Pond: We have made it clear that we shall only make a decision on this once we are sure that the new scheme is working well.

Consultation Documents

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the consultation documents issued by his Department in each of the last four years; what the cost was of producing each of these; how many documents were issued in each consultation; and how many responses were received in each consultation. [124571]

Mr. Pond: The Department for Work and Pensions came into being in June 2001. The following table gives the titles of consultation papers issued, dates of issue, number of copies issued, and written replies received. All consultation documents are also posted on the DWP internet site www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/index.asp. Formal consultation documents are only one part of the

policy development process. Other additional activity employed by DWP includes seminars, public meetings, meetings with professional and other expert groups and a web-based discussion forum. Costs of producing and printing documents is not collated centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Title of consultation	*Start date*	*Number of documents issued*	*Number of written responses*
Amending the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979	23 July 2001	70	13
Occupational Pension Scheme Winding-up Notices and Reports (etc) Regulations 2001	1 August 2001	57	29
Occupational and Personal Pension schemes (Disclosure of Information) Amendment Regulations 2001	13 August 2001	57	17
Occupational and Personal Pension schemes (contracting-out)-draft miscellaneous amending regulations	3 May 2001	160	75
Changes to Invalid Care Allowance	23 July 2001	445	133
The Minimum Funding Requirement: the next stage of reform. Consultation on the draft Occupational Pension schemes (Minimum Funding Requirements and Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 2001	18 September 2001	740	140
Private Pensions simplification	19 October 2001	225	119
Bulk transfer of accrued Pension rights without member consent	20 December 2001	35	19
Revised code of practice on gathering of information as required in Social Security Fraud Act 2001	8 April 2002	100	1
Consultation on Three Recommendations in the Myners' report "Institutional Investment in the UK—a review"	4h February 2001	102	21
Member nominated trustees and directors	12 February 2002	72	22
Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (OPRA) quinquennial review	10 May 2002	100	50
Measuring Child Poverty	18 April 2002	2,000	80
The future of the residential allowance component of income support, minimum income guarantee, jobseeker's allowance	22 May 2002	90	44
Equality, Opportunity and Independence for all (Race Relations Amendment Act)	30 May 2002	400	30
Social Security Advisory Committee review	16 January 2002	33	13
Pathways to work—helping people into employment	18 November 2002	500	137
Simplicity, security and choice—helping people into retirement	17 December 2002	15,039	800
Replacing benefit periods	20 December 2002	100	60
The Occupational Pension Schemes (Transfer Values) (Amendment) Regulations 2003	29 January 2003	12	16
The Social Security (Earning Factor) Amendment Regulations 2003	31 January 2003	5	0

Contracted-out Rebates

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) with reference to Figure A3.1 on page 148 of the Pensions Green Paper (Cm 5677), what the assumed number of people receiving contracted-out rebates is in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2011–12, *(c)* 2021–22, *(d)* 2031–32, *(e)* 2041–42 and *(f)* 2051–52; [125411]

(2) with reference to Figure A3.1 on page 148 of the Pensions Green Paper (Cm 5677), what the projected level of expenditure is *(a)* as a percentage of GDP and *(b)* in 2003 prices on contracted-out rebates in (i) 2001–02, (ii) 2011–12, (iii) 2021–22, (iv) 2031–32, (v) 2041–42 and (vi) 2051–52. [125412]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in Tables 1–3.

Figure A3.1 on page 148 of Simplicity, Security and Choice (Cm 5677), shows projected future expenditure on state benefits to people over state pensions age, including state Second Pension. The tables set out assumptions on the levels of contracting-out over time which underpinned Figure A3.1.

There have already been many changes to the contracting-out regime since the date of the last available data. The Green Paper therefore makes it clear that these assumptions should be interpreted with considerable care because of the uncertainties surrounding the assumptions used. Projecting over such a long period can be significantly affected by even minor changes in the assumptions used.

Table 1: Assumed number of people receiving contracted-out rebates

	GB-million
	Number
2001–02	13.0
2011–12	12.0
2021–22	10.7
2031–32	9.2
2041–42	8.9
2051–52	8.8

Table 2: Assumed expenditure of providing contracted-out rebates

	GB-billion
	Number
2001–02	9.5
2011–12	11.4
2021–22	11.4
2031–32	10.4
2041–42	10.6
2051–52	11.6

Table 3: Assumed expenditure as a percentage of GDP

	GB
	Percentage
2001–02	0.9
2011–12	0.9
2021–22	0.7
2031–32	0.5
2041–42	0.4
2051–52	0.3

Note:

(a) The figures shown in Table 1 were used as a basis for the Green Paper and are based only on the assumed number of people contracted out, and earning above the Lower Earnings Limit, and hence eligible for a rebate.

(b) They show the average number of people contracted out at any point in the year, rather than the total number of people who have been contracted out some time during the year.

(c) Figures are shown in constant 2002–03 price terms, except the figure for 2001–02 which has not been adjusted.

(d) The projected rebate expenditure for 2011–12 reflects the sharp rise in the cost of rebates between the 2001–02 and 2002–03 tax years. This was due to the introduction of the State Second Pension which resulted in a large increase in the amount of rebates paid to Appropriate Personal Pensions.

(e) The figures reflect the analysis of long term economic and demographic developments in the governments long term public finance report presented in November 2002.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will take steps to ensure that the Department sends out acknowledgements to letters from hon. Members writing on behalf of constituents; and when the practice of sending acknowledgements ceased. [126461]

Maria Eagle: It has not been our practice to send acknowledgements automatically to all letters received by hon. Members. We do however aim to reply to correspondence within 20 working days and send interim replies where appropriate.

Countryside Agency

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he last met the Chairman of the Countryside Agency to discuss rural proofing. [115576]

Maria Eagle: My right hon. Friend met Sir Ewen in February of this year.

Customer Conversion Centre

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what procedures are available to customers who wish to register complaints regarding his Department's Customer Conversion Centre. [126034]

Mr. Pond: Procedures are in place to ensure that customers wishing to register a complaint regarding the Customer Conversion Centre are able to do so. Complaints are recorded and dealt with by the appropriate responsible office in line with Departmental standards.

The Department can receive complaints regarding the Customer Conversion Centre through a number of channels and the procedures in place depend on the method of approach taken by the customer.

Complaints can be made directly over the telephone to call centre operatives, in writing to the call centre, the relevant business unit, or the Payment Modernisation Programme direct. Customers may also register complaints with their respective Member of Parliament or the relevant client group Chief Executive's office.

Deferred Pensions

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost of paying the basic state pension, deferred by five years, at *(a)* 110.4 per cent., *(b)* 120 per cent., *(c)* 130 per cent., *(d)* 140 per cent. and *(e)* 150 per cent. assuming the number of people choosing to defer their pension remains unchanged. [97663]

Malcolm Wicks: For every year a person defers drawing their State Pension, they are entitled to receive increases of $7\frac{1}{2}$ percentage points.

This rate is due to increase to 10.4 percentage points in 2010. In the 2002 Pensions Green Paper Simplicity, security and choice: Working and saving for retirement (Cm 5677) it was announced that the government was consulting on whether this increase should be brought forward.

The following table shows the additional cost in selected years if we were to increase the deferral rate from 2004, assuming the number of people choosing to defer their State Pension remains unchanged.

Cost in future years of increasing the deferral rate

Increase deferral rate (per cent.) to:	*Year*							
	2004	*2005*	*2010*	*2015*	*2020*	*2025*	*2030*	*Ultimate*
10.4	2	6	40	45	45	40	30	0
20	7	26	175	275	315	320	310	165
30	13	47	315	510	595	615	605	335
40	19	68	455	750	875	915	895	505
50	25	89	595	985	1155	1210	1185	675

Notes:

1. Costs include the effect of increasing the deferral rate to 10.4 per cent. in 2010, as detailed in 1995 Pensions Act
2. Figures shown in million in 2003–04 price terms
3. Figures for 2004 and 2005 rounded to nearest £1 million. Figures for 2010 and later rounded to nearest £5 million.

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost has been to the Exchequer of deferred pensions, in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms, over the last 10 years. [97665]

Malcolm Wicks: The answer is not available in the format requested.

Prior to 1999, the amount of inherited increments in payment was not recorded and so we cannot accurately estimate the total expenditure on increments before 1999. Such information as is available is shown in the following table.

Cost of paying deferred State Pension

£ million

Year	*Cash*	*Real*
2002	450	460
2001	450	470
2000	450	470
1999	450	490

Notes:

(a) Cash terms refer to the annual cost of paying all forms of increments, based upon administrative data from 30th September of each year.

(b) Real terms are calculated by taking the level of the Retail Price Index in September of each year and uprating to the level of the April 2003 Retail Price Index level.

Results include both Great Britain and overseas cases.

Figures rounded to nearest £10 million.

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have deferred their pension in each of the last five years by up to *(a)* one year, *(b)* two years, *(c)* three years, *(d)* four years and *(e)* five years. [97666]

Malcolm Wicks: It is not possible say how many people are deferring their State Pension at a single point in time because it is not necessary to inform the Department for Work and Pensions of an intention to defer. Administrative data only records people after they have finished their deferral and claimed State Pension.

The duration of deferral for pensioners who are now in receipt of State Pension has been calculated based upon the amount of increments in payment, from which the duration of deferral is calculated.

The following table shows the number of people aged five years over State Pension age who receive State Pension including increments, along with the duration of their deferral period.

Number of people aged 5 years above the State Pension age that deferred their State Pension

Deferral period	*Total*
Under 1 year	10,000
1 to 2 years	9,000
2 to 3 years	4,000
3 to 4 years	3,000
4 to 5 years	4,000
5+ years	1,000
All	31,000

Notes:

1. Based upon administrative data from September 2002
2. Numbers relate to men aged 70 and women aged 65
3. Numbers exclude people in receipt of inherited increments only
4. Numbers include recipients of a State Pension in Great Britain and overseas
5. Numbers rounded to nearest 1,000
6. People who have still not claimed their State Pension by the age of 65 (women) or 70 (men) are not included in the table above

Ductile Iron Gas Mains

Mr. Heyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions who owns the medium pressure ductile iron gas mains within 30 metres of buildings reported to HSE in response to its October 2002 warning to gas transporters other than Transco; where these are located; what programme of remedial measures the HSE has agreed with the owners; and what deadline has been set by HSE for completion of this programme. [120477]

Mr. Browne: Transco notified HSE of 35 sites which might contain medium pressure ductile iron (MPDI) gas pipework. The sites were in public or private ownership and in many parts of the country. HSE inspectors wrote individually to each site requiring a response within an eight week deadline. A third of the sites reported that they had no MPDI pipework or had already removed it. No common timescale for action was set at the remaining sites but a remedial programme is being agreed for individual sites, based on the information in the returned proformas and risk assessment. Additionally a further 12 sites where MPDI pipework was suspected have been made known to HSE and the same approach for action is being applied.

Getting clearance for the release under the Open Government Code of the list of organisations and sites that HSE is following up is a complex matter and cannot be accomplished within the timescale required. However, I will write to my hon. Friend with a summary of the results of HSE's work, when this is complete and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

E-government

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list by project the consultancies his Department and its non-departmental bodies have used on e-Government projects since 1 January 2001. [122271]

Maria Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare, (Brian Cotter) on 22 May 2003, *Official Report*, columns 920–21W.

Two consultancies were mistakenly omitted from the table in my earlier answer. The complete list is as follows.

Project	*Consultancy*	*Activity*
E-Government Strategy	BMRB	Quantitative market research
	AIA Consultancy	Qualitative market research
	Gov Connect (subcontracted by EDS)	Strategic consultancy
Interactive e-Services	Ezgov (subcontracted by EDS)	Development of electronic forms
	Accenture	Project management
	Detica	Security and authentication solutions
	Qinetiq	Security and testing
	Sema	Project management
Digital Television (The Pension Service)	DNA	Design and development
	MORI	Evaluation
Worktrain	Xansa	Future strategy consulting
	Brahm	Design
	Oakleigh Consulting	Tendering strategy and project management
	Commissum Consulting	Security review
	University of Warwick Institute for Employment Research/Adset	Classification mapping
	University of Sheffield Computing Department	Development of natural language processing
Internet Job Bank	KPMG	Project audit
	Cap Gemini Ernst and Young	Strategic review of internet job bank and worktrain
Modernising Appeals	PA Consulting	General support
	BT Syntegra	Development
Disability.gov.uk	Xansa	Web re-design
OPRA (Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority)	Logica	Strategic study on use of e-Government technologies

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of the Department's policies have been screened for their environmental impact since June 2001; how many environmental appraisals have been conducted, and on what policy issues; and what information has been published about these screenings and appraisals. [124719]

Mr. Pond: No environmental appraisals have been undertaken since June 2001. Guidance on how to conduct an initial environmental screening is available to the Department's officials and formal arrangements are being finalised for recording the results of these and any subsequent appraisals that are required. A round of formal training events on incorporating sustainable development into all decision-making is under way across the Department and its Executive Agencies. When any screenings or appraisals are undertaken in the future, the results will be published in the DWP Annual Sustainable Development Report.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the EU directives implemented by the Department since 8 June 2001. [126600]

Mr. Pond: Since 8 June 2001 the Department for Work and Pensions has implemented the following EU Directives:

Directive 1997/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 July 1997 amending for the first time Directive 90/394/EEC on the protection of workers from risks relating to exposure to carcinogens at work (Sixth individual Directive within the meaning of Article 16(1) of Directive 89/391/EEC)

Directive 1998/24/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 April 1998 on the protection of the health and safety of workers from the risks related to chemical agents at work (fourteenth individual Directive within the meaning of Article 16(1) of Directive 89/391/EEC)

Council Directive 1998/49/EC of 29 June 1998 on safeguarding the supplementary pension rights of employed and self-employed persons moving within the Community

Directive 1999/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 1999 amending for the second time Directive 90/394/EEC on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens at work and extending it to include mutagens, vinyl chloride monomer (VCM), and hardwood dusts (VCM was previously the subject of a separate Directive). (Sixth individual Directive within the meaning of Article 16(1) of Directive 89/391/EEC)

Directive 1999/45/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 31 May 1999 concerning the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the member states relating to the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous preparations

Directive 1999/92/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 1999 on minimum requirements for improving the safety and health protection of workers potentially at risk from explosive atmospheres (15th individual Directive within the meaning of Article 16(1) of Directive 89/391/EEC)

Commission Directive 2000/39/EC of 8 June 2000 establishing a first list of indicative occupational exposure limit values in implementation of Council Directive 98/24/EC on the protection of the health and safety of workers from the risks related to chemical agents at work

Parts of Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation. DWP implemented the disability discrimination aspects of the Directive in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations

Commission Directive 2001/58/EC of 27 July 2001 amending for the second time Directive 91/155/EEC defining and laying down the detailed arrangements for the system of specific information relating to dangerous preparations in implementation of Article 14 of European Parliament and

Council Directive 1999/45/EC and relating to dangerous substances in implementation of Article 27 of Council Directive 67/548/EEC (safety data sheets)

Commission Directive 2001/59/EC of 6 August 2001 adapting to technical progress for the 28th time Council Directive 67/548/EEC on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions relating to the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances

Commission Directive 2001/60/EC of 7 August 2001 adapting to technical progress Directive 1999/45/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the member states relating to the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous preparations

European Constitution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had with *(a)* colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and *(b)* counterparts in the European Union about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European Constitution. [124785]

Mr. Pond: As part of the normal Whitehall process, the Department has had regular correspondence with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss all aspects of the Convention, including legislative competences. We have also had regular contact with member and accession states to discuss issues arising in the Convention. In line with exemptions 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the normal practice of Governments to disclose details about internal discussions, or information whose disclosure would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs.

Fee-charging ATMs

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his Answer of 11 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 1036W, on fee-charging ATMs, what information is given by his Department to customers who change to direct payment about fee-charging ATMs; and if he will make a statement. [126906]

Mr. Pond: The letters and leaflets being issued to customers set out clearly their account options. It is for the customer to decide which account best meets their needs and circumstances. Customers who want to have their benefit or pension paid into a bank or building society account should discuss with their account provider the features of their chosen account.

Customers have a number of options as to how they access their money free of charge. Including, at the Post Office, over the counter at many banks and building societies, many ATMs and via the cashback facilities offered by retailers.

Fraud

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff were employed to detect and prosecute suspected fraud in each of the last six years; and what the cost was of their employment. [124498]

Mr. Pond: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to the hon. Member for Hertfordshire North-East (Mr. Heald), by my hon. Friend the former Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks), on the 12 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 502W.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have committed benefit fraud on two or more separate occasions since 1 April 2002; and of that number how many have had their benefit reduced under the two strikes provision of the Social Security Act 2001. [124504]

Mr. Pond: The provision to sanction people convicted of two separate benefit fraud offences in a three-year period, known as the 'two-strikes provision', came into force on 1 April 2002. This provision cannot be applied retrospectively and only applies to people who have committed, and then been convicted for, two separate benefit offences after that date.

To date, we have recorded five individuals who have committed and been convicted of benefit fraud on two or more occasions since 1 April 2002. In three of these cases a benefit sanction has been imposed. In the two other cases there is no current claim to a sanctionable benefit but these cases have been noted and a sanction will be imposed if they claim benefit in the next three years.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the level of fraud in *(a)* order books and *(b)* giros was in 2002–03, broken down by type of fraud; and if he will make a statement. [125265]

Mr. Pond: We estimate that total losses arising from the fraudulent encashment of order books and giro cheques during the year 2002–03 was £71.1 million.

The £21.4 million for giro cheque losses arises from three main sources. £1.8 million was lost from counterfeiting, £2.6 million from manipulation/forgery and £17.0 million from duplicate encashment/repudiation. £49.7 million was lost through fraudulent encashment of order books. It is not possible to break this figure down by type of fraud.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many instances there were of income support fraud in Scotland, broken down by local authority, in each year since 1997; [124837]

(2) what the estimated cost of job seeker's allowance fraud in Scotland was in each year since 1997, broken down by local authority; [1248348]

(3) what the estimated cost of income support fraud in Scotland was in each year since 1997, broken down by local authority; [125320]

(4) how many instances there were of jobseeker's allowance fraud in Scotland, broken down by local authority, in each year since 1997. [125321]

Mr. Pond: Information on the level of fraud in Scotland broken down by local authority is not available. However, information on the estimated level

of fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance in the whole of Scotland is in the following reports, copies of which are available in the Library:

The Results of the Area Benefit Review from April 1998 to March 1999 and Measurements for the Public Service Agreement: Fraud and Error in Claims for Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance.

The Results of the Area Benefit Review and the Quality Support Team from April 1999 to March 2000: Fraud and Error in Claims for Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance.

The Results of the Area Benefit Review and the Quality Support Team from April 2000 to March 2001: Fraud and Error in Claims for Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance.

Fraud and Error in Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance from April 2001 to March 2002.

Health and Safety Executive

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the funding for the Health and Safety Executive in *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* each of the last three years, broken down by region. [124525]

Mr. Browne: The table reflects the funding for the Health and Safety Executive in each year since 2000–01.

	Budget1 (£ million)
2000–01[2]	181.3
2001–02[3]	199.4
2002–03	210.4
2003–04	225.5

[1] The funding has been interpreted as the total amount voted by Parliament.
[2] The budget for 2000–01 was the last under the cash budget system.
[3] A proportion of increase in the funding was due to the introduction/implementation of Resource Accounting and Budgeting (RAB) in Government Departments. Under RAB, all Departments produce budgets and accounts on an accruals basis, which include costs for depreciation, cost of capital and provisions for liabilities.
Note:
The funding is not broken down by region.

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many health and safety inspectors there are in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales, and how many there were in each year since 1998. [124526]

Mr. Browne: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, East and Wallsend (Mr. Brown) gave on 7 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 1269W.

Health and Safety Inspectors

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many health and safety inspectors are employed by his Department; and how many were employed in each of the last five years; [112712]

(2) how many health and safety inspectors there are in England and Wales; and how many there were in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002. [118555]

Mr. Browne: The Department for Work and Pensions does not employ Health and Safety Inspectors. However, since 2002 it has been responsible for sponsoring the Health and Safety Executive (HSE); the number of Heath and Safety Inspectors employed by HSE in each of the last five years is given in the following table.

	Inspectors
1 April 1998	1,437
1 April 1999	1,497
1 April 2000	1,507
1 April 2001	1,534
1 April 2002	1,625
1 April 2003	1,651

Housing Benefit

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on progress towards reform of the housing benefit system. [126587]

Mr. Pond: Our overall strategy for reforming housing benefit is to improve administration, promote choice and responsibility, enhance work incentives and reduce levels of fraud and error in the system.

We are abolishing the need to automatically reclaim housing benefit after a set period, and in October we launched Rapid Reclaim for Housing Benefit. This has removed barriers to taking and declaring work by reducing concerns about the delays in reclaiming benefits if a job does not last.

And in his most recent Budget statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer reaffirmed our commitment to reform housing benefit. He announced new measures to apply the 30-hour disregard in housing benefit and council tax benefit to those working between 16 and 29 hours per week; to change the hospital downrating rules so that there will be no reduction in benefit for those in hospital for up to 52 weeks; and to extend the housing benefit run-on to people receiving incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance.

The Standard Local Housing Allowance is a further, radical step forward in the simplification of housing benefit, which we will test out in 10 pathfinder local authorities from October 2003.

Incapacity Benefit

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the 200 wards with the highest percentage of adults claiming incapacity benefit in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Wales. [126103]

Maria Eagle: The information has been placed in the library.

Income Support

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was claimed in income support in Scotland in 2002–03, broken down by local authority area. [126849]

Mr. Pond: Income support gross benefit expenditure in Scotland for 2002–03 was £1,521,323,469.27. This figure is not available broken down by local authority area but is available by district and local office, and this information has placed in the Library.

Information Leaflet

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason the Plain English Campaign's Crystal Mark does not apply to the section on collecting and using information on page 6 of the Information about Pension Credit leaflet, ref. PC1N 04/03. [126751]

Malcolm Wicks: The section in question derives from the requirements of the Fair Processing Code of the Data Protection Act 1998 and is common to a number of the Department's forms and leaflets. Minor changes to the original wording suggested by the Plain English Campaign were not considered to be consistent with its intended meaning.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by his Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if he will make a statement. [126196]

Maria Eagle: The question covers periods prior to the establishment of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in June 2001. This reply therefore relates to outsourced IT contracts signed by the former Employment Service and the former Department for Social Security, both of whom had made their own contractual arrangements prior to merging to form DWP. No further outsourced IT contracts have been signed since the formation of DWP.

IT Partnership Agreement: On 1 August 1998, the Employment Service outsourced its IT work in a contract with Electronic Data Systems. In October 2000, the agreement was revised to reflect major new investment in IT and telephony to improve services for jobless people and employers in the Modernising Employment Service (MES) Project.

Strategic Outsourcing Business Allocation (SOBA): On 1 September 2000, the Department of Social Security outsourced the provision of its IT design, development, delivery functions and operations to Electronic Data Systems, as prime contractor of the Affinity consortium.

Both contracts are still in place.

The value of these contracts is commercial in confidence and is not disclosed in line with paragraph 13, Part 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

The Department for Work and Pensions continuously seeks to ensure that both contracts meet the future needs of the Department.

IT Expenditure

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much he spent on IT *(a)* maintenance, *(b)* licences, *(c)* software and *(d)* hardware in the last financial year. [125718]

Mr. Browne: In 2002–03, the Department spent £103 million on IT maintenance, although this figure does not include any local service agreements that may have been negotiated outside the central contracts. £4 million was spent on software licences and £142 million was spent on hardware, mostly in connection with the provision of new desktop IT equipment in the Department. Software costs are often not separately identified from the hardware to which they relate.

The above information does not include costs of licenses, software and hardware where these are provided via PFI/PPP service contracts. In these circumstances, the costs form part of the service charge and are not separately identified.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is in cases of individuals claiming Jobseeker's Allowance refusing a job on grounds of conscientious objection; and if he will make a statement. [125239]

Mr. Pond: Individuals are sanctioned when they refuse to take up employment, unless they can show good cause for doing so. Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations specify that a person is considered to have good cause where, among other things, they have a sincerely held religious or conscientious objection to taking up the employment being offered.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many fixed period sanctions have been applied in the income-related jobseeker's allowance in each year since the sanctions were first applied, broken down by whether claimants have without good cause *(a)* failed to carry out a reasonable jobseekers directive, *(b)* failed to apply for a compulsory training scheme or employment programme where this has been notified to them, *(c)* given up a place on, or failed to attend, a compulsory training scheme or employment programme, *(d)* neglected a reasonable opportunity of a place on a training scheme or employment programme and *(e)* lost a place on a compulsory training scheme or employment programme because of misconduct; if he will break down these figures according to whether (i) two and (ii) four weeks' sanction was applied; and if he will make a statement; [125912]

(2) how many claimants sanctions have been taken since the introduction of the jobseekers allowance broken down by whether *(a)* they lost their job through misconduct, *(b)* left their job voluntarily without just cause, *(c)* failed to apply for or to accept a job notified by the Employment Service without just cause, *(d)* neglected a reasonable opportunity of a job without good cause and *(e)* suffered sanctions for other reasons, and by whether the claimants were (i) men and (ii) women, and the age of the claimants, noting for each category the average length during which the sanction applied; and if he will make a statement. [125913]

Mr. Pond: Information on sanctions broken down by gender, age, length of sanction or type of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) is not collected centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Information is only recorded on the number of sanctions imposed. It is not possible to say how many individuals have been sanctioned as an individual could be subject to more than one sanction.

The available information on the number of sanctions imposed for the periods requested is published in the quarterly publications Labour Market Statistics Analysis of Adjudication Officers Decisions and, from the quarter ending 30 June 2002, the Labour Market Statistics Analysis of Sector Decision Making. Copies of these publications are available in the Library. Fixed period sanctions are listed at decision numbers 713 to 718, the New Deal sanctions decision numbers 713(E to V) to 717(E to V) are also fixed period sanctions.

Lone Parents

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many lone parents have had income support reduced as a sanction for failure to attend a compulsory personal adviser meeting; and if he will make a statement. [124548]

Mr. Browne: We have introduced compulsory Work Focused Interviews for lone parents claiming income support to ensure that they are aware of the wide range of help they can access to move into work. We are giving lone parents more choices and more help than ever before to move off welfare and into work, in return for greater responsibility to consider the help that is on offer.

Between May 2001 and April 2003 4,352 lone parents had their income support reduced as a sanction for failure to participate in a compulsory personal adviser meeting.

In addition 1,800 lone parents making new or repeat claims have had their claim disallowed because good cause was not shown for non-participation in a compulsory personal adviser meeting.

Media Training

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost was to his Department of media and voice training for ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123137]

Maria Eagle: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed on 8 June 2001 from parts of the former Department of Social Security, parts of the former Department for Education and Employment. Information on media training is not held centrally for the period of 1997 until June 2001.

No media or voice training has been provided for Ministers, at a cost to the Department, since June 2001 to date.

Costs for media training for Departmental Press Office Staff is as follows:

£

	2001–02	*2002–03*
National Press Office	20,230	12,044
Regional Press Offices	24,283	22,344

Minimum Wage

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* financial and *(b)* other support is available to (i) an individual and (ii) a family where the sole earner receives the national minimum wage; and which benefits are available when the earner is working (A) part-time and (B) full-time. [115571]

Mr. Pond: Families with children are eligible for the Child Tax Credit whether or not they are in work and as long as family income does not exceed certain maxima. In addition, workers with children or a disability can claim Working Tax Credit if they work at least 16 hours a week, and workers over 25 can claim if they are working at least 30 hours a week where family income is below certain levels. All families with children are also entitled to Child Benefit.

From October 2003, the Working Tax Credit guarantees a minimum income of £241 a week for a family with one child and one earner working full-time on the National Minimum Wage and £187 a week for a single earner couple without children or a disability, aged 25 or over and working full-time on the National Minimum Wage.

Individuals and families where the sole earner works less than 16 hours per week and receives the national minimum wage may be entitled to receive Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support, or Incapacity Benefit, in addition to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit may also be payable to people in full-time work on low income grounds.

People who receive either Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance and satisfy the relevant conditions of entitlement may also be entitled to free milk and vitamins, free school meals and payments to assist prison visits. They are also entitled to help with National Health Service charges, optical costs and travel costs to hospital for NHS treatment. Families on a low income may also be entitled to help with these costs through the NHS Low Income Scheme. Certain recipients of Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit are also eligible for help with these costs, and certain recipients of Child Tax Credit are eligible for free school meals.

People receiving Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Child Tax Credit or Working Tax Credit with a disability element and have an annual income of less than £13,896 may also be able to get assistance with the costs of visiting a close family member or partner who is being held in prison.

Receipt of Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance also gives people access to the Social Fund.

A variety of local government schemes and benefits are also available to people onlow incomes. Details of these schemes are not collected centrally.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost was to his Department of mobile phones supplied to Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123146]

Maria Eagle: The purchase cost of mobile telephone equipment is charged to an account code that includes the cost of all telecommunication equipment up to

£2,000, e.g. faxes, dictaphones etc. Mobile phone purchase costs could not be separately identified without incurring disproportionate costs. However, the running costs for departmental mobile phones is separately identified and these details are as follows.

Department of Social Security

	£000
1997–98	1,330
1998–99	1,213
1999–2000	1,447
2000–01	1,344

Department for Work and Pensions

	£000
2001–02	3,223
2002–03	3,369

The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 and brought together the former Department of Social Security and parts of the former Department for Education and Employment.

Telephone calls made using privately owned mobile phones, but subsequently reclaimed, are charged to an account code which also includes call charges relating to land lines. To separately identify mobile calls would mean investigating all expenses claim forms for the last six years. This exercise could not be completed without incurring disproportionate costs.

National Insurance

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate for each contributory benefit the extra annual expenditure which would result from abolition of the national insurance contribution requirement. [125118]

Mr. Pond: The available information is in the table.

Estimated additional annual cost of contributory benefits if there was no contribution condition

£ million

Benefit	Estimated annual cost
Basic state pension	4,100
Incapacity benefit	600
Jobseeker's allowance	200
Bereavement benefits	200

Notes:

1. The costs are net of income-related benefit offsets. They are rounded to the nearest £100 million and are given in 2003–04 prices.
2. State pension costs are for the basic state pension only and do not include the state second pension, graduated retirement benefit (GRB) or state earnings related pension (SERPS). It is assumed that all those people of state pension age and above in 2003–04 receive the maximum rate payable of the basic state pension regardless of their underlying contribution record. This is £77.45 in 2003–04.
3. For incapacity benefit (IB) and jobseeker's allowance (JSA), the costs cover payments which would be made to people who are currently claiming the benefits as credits only (for IB we have assumed SDA claimants would also become entitled to IB). In practice, there would also be costs generated from people who currently satisfy the medical or actively seeking work conditions for IB or JSA, but do not claim because they fail the contribution conditions.
4. For bereavement benefits, the estimate is of the likely cost of paying a full basic or age-related rate of widowed parent's allowance (WPA), widows pension (WP), widowed mother's allowance (WMA) and bereavement allowance (BA) to all those who currently receive those benefits. Due to the limitations of the data, the estimate is likely to be an upper limit to the costs of this change. No estimate is available of the numbers of people who would become newly entitled.
5. The costs for all benefits exclude dependency increases.

Sources:

1. Costs for incapacity benefit and jobseeker's allowance are estimated from a 5 per cent. sample of benefit records taken in February 2003.
2. Costs for bereavement benefit are estimated from a 5 per cent. sample of benefit records taken in September 2002.
3. Costs for the basic state pension are based on estimates supplied by the Government Actuary's Department. Income-related benefit offsets are calculated using the Department for Work and Pensions Policy Simulation model.

New Deal

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many sanctions have been applied to New Deal participants, broken down by programme, in each year since the programme began; how many sanctions have been applied to participants in Employment Zones since they began; how many sanctions there were on *(a)* each New Deal programme which uses sanctions and *(b)* Employment Zones, broken down by reason for the sanction; and if he will make a statement. [122469]

Mr. Browne: Within the New Deal programme, benefit sanctions are applied only within the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) and New Deal 25plus.

Information on the numbers of sanctions applied to NDYP participants, broken down by reason for sanction, up to March 1999, is published in the 'Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions'. Information from April 1999 onwards is published in 'Analysis of Sector Decision Making'. These are available in the Library.

Separate information is not available for sanctions for New Deal 25plus participants. We are currently developing an IT enhancement to enable collection of accurate information on the sanctions imposed

The information requested for Employment Zones has been placed in the Library.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* proportion and *(b)* number of people have found employment as a result of the New Deal, broken down by programme, in each year since these schemes have been introduced; how many of these were in sustained employment (i) six months and (ii) 12 months after leaving New Deal; how many returned to jobseeker's allowance after (A) six months and (B) 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [124540]

Mr. Browne: The New Deal has been a success, helping nearly 900,000 people into work by the end of March 2003. In a dynamic labour market, it is inevitable that some people will experience unemployment after leaving the New Deal. However, those who do return to benefit will have added to their skills and experience, making it easier for them to find a job in the future.

Information is not collected on jobs gained through the New Deal which were sustained for six months or 12 months, or on those returning to benefit following participation in NDLP, NDDP or New Deal 50+.

The available information has been placed in the Library.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of those who left the gateway of the New Deal for Young People without proceeding to any of the options were in full-time employment 12 months later; and if he will make a statement. [124541]

Mr. Browne: The information requested is not available.

For the purposes of recording New Deal statistics, employment is classed as sustained if the individual has not returned to claim Job Seeker's Allowance within 13 weeks.

Based on this definition, by the end of March 2003, of the people who had left the programme without proceeding to any of the NDYP options, 42 per cent. left to an unsubsidised job.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of New Deal leavers have entered sustained unsubsidised jobs since the programme began; and if he will make a statement. [124542]

Mr. Browne: For the purposes of New Deal statistics, employment is classed as sustained if the individual has not returned to claim Job Seeker's Allowance within 13 weeks.

Information on New Deal leavers moving into sustained work is published in the 'New Deal for Young People and Long Term Unemployed People aged 25 plus Statistical First Release'. This is available in the Library. Equivalent figures are not available for the other New Deal programmes.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of people who went on to New Deal have left for unknown destinations, broken down by (i) programme and (ii) ethnicity in each year since the programmes began; and if he will make a statement. [124543]

Mr. Browne: Information on destinations on leaving New Deal is available for New Deal for Young People, New Deal 25plus, and the New Deal for Lone Parents. Equivalent information is not available for the other New Deals.

The available information has been placed in the Library.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many lone parents who have participated in the New Deal for Lone Parents have later returned to income support, broken down by *(a)* those who originally left the NDLP because they found work, *(b)* those who left the NDLP to return immediately to income support and *(c)* those who left the NDLP for other reasons; and if he will make a statement. [124544]

Mr. Browne: The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) is delivering services tailored to meet the needs of individual lone parents and giving them the skills, support and confidence they need to move into work. By the end of March 2003, it had helped over 193,000 lone parents to find jobs.

The information requested on the number of lone parents claiming income support after leaving NDLP is not available. However, the recent evaluation of the NDLP national programme found that over 87 per cent. of those lone parents moving into work through NDLP were still in work six months later.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of participants in the New Deal for Young People from non-white ethnic minorities found *(a)* jobs and *(b)* sustained jobs in each year since 1997, broken down by ethnic minority; and if he will make a statement. [124545]

Mr. Browne: The information is in the table:

New deal for young people—Percentage of each ethnic group moving into work[1]

	1998		*1999*		*2000*	
Ethnic group	*All jobs*	*Sustained*	*All jobs*	*Sustained*	*All jobs*	*Sustained*
White	58.1	43.5	59.1	45.4	57.5	43.7
Black—Caribbean	46.3	31.4	46.3	32.8	45.0	31.3
Black—African	38.8	25.7	39.1	26.9	38.1	26.8
Black—other	45.9	30.9	46.4	32.9	45.5	32.6
Indian	52.0	41.2	50.6	40.4	51.7	42.2
Pakistani	45.2	34.6	44.7	34.3	44.2	35.1
Bangladeshi	47.2	37.1	47.4	39.3	44.6	37.0
Chinese	43.7	36.0	46.4	38.8	43.4	36.1
Mixed/other	45.9	34.1	44.0	33.3	43.3	33.1

	2001		*2002*[2]		*2003*[2]	
Ethnic group	*All jobs*	*Sustained*	*All jobs*	*Sustained*	*All jobs*	*Sustained*
White	54.0	40.2	45.5	33.2	15.6	13.3
Black—Caribbean	37.7	25.7	29.3	20.1	8.5	6.9
Black—African	35.9	24.8	24.6	17.4	6.1	4.8
Black—other	37.2	26.9	31.7	21.2	6.0	5.0
Indian	48.3	39.1	43.2	35.2	14.9	13.0
Pakistani	39.0	30.1	32.4	24.5	8.7	8.1

Ethnic group	2001		2002[2]		2003[2]	
	All jobs	Sustained	All jobs	Sustained	All jobs	Sustained
Bangladeshi	40.5	32.2	35.9	27.8	9.4	8.2
Chinese	45.0	34.1	35.9	30.4	8.4	7.5
Mixed/other	38.9	29.5	30.7	24.2	10.6	9.7

Notes:
1. On a review of statistics, we have found that previous figures published on the breakdown by ethnicity included some accounting errors. This has now been corrected and the figures in this table supersede all previous figures provided.
2. Figures for these years will appear to be lower as a higher proportion of starters will still be on the programme.
Source:
DWP Statistical Services Information and Analysis Directorate

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of each quarterly cohort on the full-time education and training option in the New Deal for Young People left with the qualification for which they aimed in each quarter since its inception; and if he will make a statement. [124546]

Mr. Browne: Information on the achievement of qualifications by New Deal participants is not collected on a national basis.

Information on qualifications held and subsequently achieved through New Deal is recorded and monitored by New Deal Personal Advisers on an individual basis at local level. However, information at national level could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average cost per place on each of the four options in the New Deal for Young People was in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [124547]

Mr. Browne: The New Deal for Young People (NDYP) has successfully helped over 420,000 young people into jobs, and represents value for money to the taxpayer. We are now building on the success of the programme by providing more help for those who face the greatest barriers to work, providing more individually-tailored support, and engaging further with employers to ensure their needs are met.

Information about the cost per participant of each option in the NDYP is not collected. However, Jobcentre Plus are currently developing a unit cost model that will enable us to provide this information in future.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of persons leaving *(a)* the intensive gateway period, *(b)* the extended gateway and *(c)* each of the four options in the New Deal for Young People entered (i) unsubsidised and (ii) sustained jobs in each year since its inception; what proportion of persons left (A) first stage and (B) second stage of employment zones; and if he will make a statement. [124549]

Mr. Browne: For the purposes of recording New Deal for Young People statistics, employment is classed as sustained if the individual has not returned to claim Job Seeker's Allowance within 13 weeks. Employment can only be subsidised whilst an individual is participating in the programme, therefore all employment obtained on leaving the programme is unsubsidised.

In exceptional circumstances, New Deal for Young People (NDYP) participants can have their Gateway period extended. However, these cases are not recorded separately.

Information on the percentages of NDYP participants entering unsubsidised, sustained jobs and the numbers of leavers from Employment Zones Steps one and two has been placed in the Library.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many participants on New Deal for Young People have been placed on training courses longer than a year in each year since the programme began; and if he will make a statement. [124550]

Mr. Browne: It is the policy of New Deal for Young People (NDYP) that nobody should be placed on an NDYP Full-Time Education and Training Course for longer than a year.

Information on the length of courses taken up by young people on the New Deal Full-Time Education and Training Option is not held centrally and could be only obtained at disproportionate cost.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many participants have joined the New Deal for Young People *(a)* once, *(b)* twice, *(c)* three times and *(d)* more than three times; and if he will make a statement. [124552]

Mr. Browne: The information is in the table.

New Deal for Young People (NDYP): Number of times participants have joined the programme

Number of times on NDYP	Number
One	582,330
Two	135,500
Three	29,290
More than three	3,480

Source:
DWP Statistical Services Information and Analysis Directorate

New Deal for Young People has been a success in helping more than 420,000 young people move into work and 79 per cent. of these have moved into jobs lasting 13 weeks or more. Although some young people will re-experience unemployment after leaving New Deal, the skills and experience they acquire after finding work through the programme will make it easier for them to find employment in the future.

We have also introduced other measures to help people facing additional barriers to work, for example the StepUP pilots, which build on the New Deal for

Young People and New Deal 25 plus by providing transitional jobs for those who have not secured sustained employment through New Deal.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 26 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 962W, on the New Deal, on what basis the calculation of cost per job for New Deal programmes was made; and if he will make a statement. [125934]

Mr. Browne: The average cost of a young person moving into work through the New Deal for Young people was an approximate estimate made in 2000 based on the average spend per young person on the New Deal and the percentage of New Deal participants who had found a job. This was produced specifically in response to the Education and Employment Select Committee's report 'New Deal for Young People—Two Years On'.

The cost per participant moving into work for the New Deal for Lone Parents was based on independent evaluation (DSS Report No. 108 'Evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents: Early Lessons from the Phase One Prototype—Synthesis Report'). A copy of this report is in the Library.

Recently, new evaluation has been published showing that far from costing the taxpayer money the New Deal for Lone Parents actually saves money. Every lone parent moving into work equates to a saving to the exchequer of nearly £1,600. This evaluation was published in the DWP research report 'New Deal for Lone Parents: Second Synthesis Report of the National Evaluation'. A copy of this report is available in the Library.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what criteria are used by New Deal for Lone Parents advisers to determine whether they will assist with the provision of child care; what the maximum amount is they are empowered to spend on child care per client; and what total annual budget was available on average per client under the NDLP in the last 12 months for discretionary expenditure. [105968]

Mr. Browne: New Deal for Lone Parents offers assistance with the costs of registered childcare paid while the lone parent attends interviews with their personal adviser, job interviews arranged by their adviser, or other agreed activity. The amount that can be paid for child care costs is up to £135 per week for one child, £200 per week for 2 or more children.

This assistance is available to all NDLP participants. NDLP personal advisers will consider whether the amount charged is reasonable, taking into account their knowledge of average charges in their local area.

Additional help is available through the Adviser Discretion Fund. The fund can offer help with upfront costs of up to £300 which could go towards child care costs where the personal adviser determines this could help overcome obstacles to accepting a job offer. Help from this fund is available to NDLP participants who have not been working, and have not been in full time education, in the preceding six months. The maximum available per client per year from this Discretionary fund is £300.

Operation Gangmaster

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the progress of Operation Gangmaster. [126734]

Mr. Pond: Operation Gangmaster began in 1998 and, following disruption caused by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, was re-launched in April 2002. Operation Gangmaster brings together representatives from a range of Government Departments and Agencies and, where appropriate, the police to tackle gangmasters operating illegal practices. This group operates in two ways.

The first function is to gather and collate evidence on gangmasters operating in the informal economy. This intelligence enables us to ensure that specialist gangmaster compliance activity is better targeted and more effective.

The second function of Operation Gangmaster is to organise specific operations, using appropriate compliance staff drawn from the relevant Departments and Agencies, to tackle particular gangmasters known to be involved in illegal practices. These operations are lead by the Department or Agency that has the major interest in the individual case.

Operation Gangmaster does not replace the normal compliance activity taken by each Department or Agency. However, it does provide a co-ordinated approach to tackling gangmasters that may be involved in a range of illegal activity such as breaches of immigration or employment law; tax offences and benefit fraud.

Each Department and Agency maintains their own statistics on results of operations. Over the last year Department for Work and Pensions officials have imposed sanctions on 138 people who were involved in benefit fraud, made 18,000 adjustments to benefit entitlements and identified overpayments of benefit in 235 cases.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 15 July 2003, ref 124888, if he will list the Government Departments and agencies in the Gangmaster Working Group. [126989]

Mr. Pond: Lord Grabiner recommended that Government Departments should work together in tackling informal economy issues. A Grabiner steering group (now called the Informal Economy Steering Group) was set up to promote Joint Working across Government on informal economy issues. Lower level working groups support the steering group in operational initiatives. One such initiative is Operation Gangmaster, which operates in nine regional forums. The following Departments are directly involved:

The Department for Work and Pensions (lead Department/ Agency for Operation Gangmaster and producers of all Operations).

Her Majesty's Custom and Excise (Chair of the Working Group and Secretariat).

Inland Revenue.

National Asylum Support Service.

Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

United Kingdom Immigration Service.

Other Departments involved on an ad hoc basis include the following:

Health and Safety Executive.

Social Services.

Uniform and Plain Clothes Police Officers including Special Branch etc.

Scottish Executive for Rural Affairs.

Operational Intelligence Units

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases have been processed through the operational intelligence units in *(a)* Glasgow and *(b)* Edinburgh in each month since 1997; how many staff have been employed in their operational intelligence units in (i) Glasgow and (ii) Edinburgh in each month since 1997; and what the planned staffing levels are for each centre. [125480]

Mr. Pond: By the end of 2003–04 it is planned to transfer the work of the Edinburgh unit to the Glasgow site in order to improve co-ordination of the delivery of Operational Intelligence Unit services across Scotland. The Glasgow Operational Intelligence Unit will employ 49 staff.

The information requested on past staffing and work levels is in the table:

	Glasgow[1]		*Edinburgh*[2]	
Year/Month	*[3]Cases*	*No. of Staff*	*[3]Cases*	*No. of Staff*
July to September 2001	[4]1,189	3		
October	384	3	[4]1,379	9
November	[5]241	8		9
December	349	8		9
January 2002	638	10		11
February	[5]	12		10
March	[5]	17	450	10
April	799	18	456	13
May	591	19	725	13
June	594	20	559	11
July	1,106	22	579	10
August	1,642	23	498	11
September	1,119	23	658	11
October	792	23	796	12
November	720	23	587	13
December	825	22	565	13
January 2003	1,039	23	763	15
February	1,138	26	864	16
March	1,271	27	897	18
April	1,541	26	1,198	21
May	1,395	26	1,091	21
June	1,625	25	1,423	21

[1] The Glasgow Operational Intelligence Unit began operating in July 2001.
[2] The Edinburgh Operational Intelligence Unit began operating in October 2001.
[3] Data requests and fraud referrals.
[4] These figures are not available broken down per month.
[5] Records were maintained clerically and are incomplete for these months.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to answer question number 114044, tabled by the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire for answer on Monday 19 May. [120325]

Maria Eagle: A reply was given to the hon. Member on 19 June. Further information was given in a subsequent reply on 15 July.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether it is his policy that written answers from Ministers in his Department should be deposited in the Library on the day of answering before the rising of the House; and if he will make a statement. [126367]

Maria Eagle: Written answers are despatched in time for them to be delivered before the rising of the House on the day of answering. If the hon. Member is aware of any difficulties I will be pleased to look into the matter.

Pendle

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what policies *(a)* initiated and *(b)* managed by his Department since 2001 had an impact on Pendle; and if he will make a statement. [124087]

Maria Eagle: Since 2001 this Department has introduced a range of reforms which are delivering opportunity and independence for all. Amongst the major reforms are the introduction of work focused interviews and the New Deal programmes that are helping people return to work and contribute to record levels of employment. To protect today's pensioners we introduced the Minimum Income Guarantee, which ensures a minimum level of income for all pensioners; and from October this year, the Pension Credit which will also reward modest savings. In addition, the Winter Fuel Payment is payable to all pensioner households and will be increased by 100 from this winter for every household where someone is aged 80 or over. The Child Support reforms will increase the levels of child maintenance paid to parents, and along with the introduction of the Child Tax Credit, are helping to tackle child poverty. We have also introduced a range of policies that protect people from discrimination on the grounds of disability, help more people with disabilities to find employment, or support those who are unable to work.

These policies impact upon the whole of Great Britain. The Departmental Report contains details of all areas of DWP's work. This can be accessed, via the internet at: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2003/dwpreport/index.asp Copies of the Departmental Report are available in the Library.

To indicate the impact of some of the policies introduced, unemployment as a proportion of the working age population in Pendle has fallen since 1997 to 2.3 per cent. from 2.8 per cent., with over 20 per cent. fewer lone parents claiming income support. And more than 16,000 pensioners in Pendle will be entitled to the Winter Fuel Payment this year.

Pension Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place a copy of the pension credit application form in the Library. [116725]

Malcolm Wicks: A copy of the Pension Credit Application form is available in the Library. This application form is only for the period of advance applications (7 April to 5 October 2003) and will be replaced on the 6 October 2003. A copy of the new form will be placed in the Library when it is available. The supplementary forms also placed in the Library are used

depending on the pensioners circumstances and have been created to reduce the complexity of the main application form for many pensioners.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost of postage for *(a)* writing to all those aged 60 and over to tell them about their possible entitlement to pension credit and *(b)* the return of the pension credit application form by freepost. [126387]

Malcolm Wicks: It is currently estimated that the postage costs of sending direct mail packs about Pension Credit will be in the region of £1.33 million to the end of May 2004 and that the postage costs of returning completed forms by freepost will be in the region of £0.67 million to the end of May 2004.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what payment options are available to people filling in the pension credit application form who tick the box in part 13B stating that they do not agree to having their money paid direct into any type of account. [126388]

Malcolm Wicks: The normal method of payment of Pension Credit will be by direct payment into an account. There are a number of types of account available. Customers who contact the Pension Credit application line are taken through a discussion which covers general aspects of current accounts, basic bank accounts and the Post Office card account to make them aware of the options open to them. Customers who indicate that they do not agree to their money being paid direct into an account can be paid by order book in the short term. It is explained to them that the Department is in the process of inviting all its customers to convert to direct payment and that order books and giro cheques will eventually be phased out by spring 2005. We have always recognised that there will be a small number of people who we cannot pay directly into an account. We will develop an alternative method of pay to this group, which can be accessed at Post Office branches.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), of 10 July 2003, columns 979–80W, what proportion of pensioners are estimated to be affected by each of the significant changes that must be reported to the Pension Service by a Pension Credit recipient; and what proportion of pensioners are affected by one or more of them each year. [126623]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested however it is estimated that, in one year, 0.2 per cent. of the Pension Credit caseload will report a marriage or divorce, 1.2 per cent. death of a partner, 10 per cent. will report admission to a care home and 11 per cent. admission to hospital.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his written statement of 14 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 6–7WS, on the pension credit, how many of the pensioner households ready to be paid pension credit from October are *(a)* existing recipients of minimum income guarantee and *(b)* non-recipients of minimum income guarantee. [127040]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available at this stage in the advance application period in the form requested. We intend from November to publish monthly reports on the progress of Pension Credit take-on, which will include a more detailed breakdown.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps are being taken to minimise the potential for pension credit fraud in advance of its introduction. [124840]

Mr. Pond: The Pension Service has established a programme protection strategy which will help combat fraud in claims to pension credit.

The strategy is aimed at maximising the opportunities provided, in the course of contacts with all customers, to support them in getting the claims correct at the outset, and in keeping those claims correct through the life of the claim. A programme of case management using scans based on data matching of internal and external data sources, together with regular case checks on areas of established risk, will limit the opportunities for fraud.

Pension Service

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many hours of staff absence there have been among Pension Service employees each month in the last two years. [121497]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested. However, the average working days lost for the whole period April 2002 to March 2003 was 9.9.

Pensioners

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answers of 7 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 88W, and 2 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 346W, on pensioners, if he will break down the column headed income related benefit savings into *(a)* the guarantee element of the pension credit, *(b)* the savings element of the pension credit, *(c)* housing benefit and *(d)* council tax benefit. [125655]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is set out in the following table.

A breakdown of income-related benefit savings

£

	Pension credit guarantee	*Pension credit savings credit*	*Housing benefit*	*Council tax benefit*	*Total*
2003–04	90m	60m	20m	10m	180m
2004–05	240m	150m	60m	40m	500m
2005–06	400m	200m	90m	60m	800m
2006–07	500m	300m	120m	80m	1bn
2007–08	700m	400m	160m	100m	1.3bn
2008–09	800m	500m	200m	120m	1.6bn
2009–10	1bn	600m	240m	150m	2bn
2010–11	1.2bn	700m	280m	170m	2.3bn
2011–12	1.3bn	800m	320m	200m	2.7bn
2012–13	1.5bn	900m	370m	230m	3bn

Notes:

1. The figures are in 2002–03 price terms. The totals are rounded to the nearest £100 million, except 2003–04 which is rounded to the nearest £10 million. The totals may not sum due to rounding. Housing benefit and council tax benefit figures are rounded to the

nearest £10 million. Pension Credit figures are rounded to the nearest £100 million, except in 2003–04 and 2004–05 which are rounded to the nearest £10 million.

2. Income related benefit offsets are calculated using the DWP's Policy Simulation model for 2003–04. Calculations assume Pension Credit is in place for the full financial year 2003–04 and that the starting point of the savings credit increases to the new value of the basic State Pension.

3. The income related benefit offsets are assumed to remain a constant proportion of the additional expenditure on the basic State Pension in future years as a result of introducing an earnings link in April 2003. The split between the guarantee credit and the savings credit is assumed to remain constant in future years.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) pursuant to Working and Saving for Retirement: Action on Occupational Pensions, if his plans to ease the indexation requirements will apply to an individual's accrued rights prior to the implementation of his reforms; [121119]

(2) pursuant to Working and Saving for Retirement: Action on Occupational Pensions, if it is his intention to allow firms to protect part of an individual's pension contribution at 5 per cent. and the rest at 2.5 per cent. [121120]

Malcolm Wicks: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear in his statement to the House on 11 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 682, the proposals in the Action Plan for Occupational Pensions for relaxing the mandatory indexation requirements will not affect pensions in payment, nor the value of existing accrued rights. The value of 5 per cent. protection to the date the new mandatory minimum cap takes effect must be safeguarded.

As he also made clear, the proposed changes to Section 67 of the Pensions Act will allow schemes significantly more scope to achieve simplification by restructuring benefits. Schemes should be able to translate accrued entitlement into rights of equivalent value provided they continue to meet the applicable legislative requirements, including those concerning annual increases in accrued rights.

Subject to the indexation requirements, it will continue to be for schemes to determine the level to which an individual's pension in payment is protected from inflation. Some schemes choose—and will continue to choose—to protect members' pensions at a level above the legislative requirement.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to issue *(a)* a further response to the consultation on the Pensions Green Paper (Cm 5677) and *(b)* a White Paper on pensions; and if he will make statement. [126466]

Malcolm Wicks: The Government published its response to the Pensions Green Paper on 11 June 2003. The document, Simplicity, security and choice: Working and saving for retirement—Action on occupational pensions (Cm 5677), sets out the timetable of our reform programme, on which we will make further announcements in due course.

Public Appointments

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the appointees to the *(a)* Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board, *(b)* Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, *(c)* Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority and *(d)* Social Security Advisory Committee and which of the appointees from each body are from ethnic minorities. [122993]

Maria Eagle: The information requested is in the table.

Position	*Appointee*	*Ethnic Minority Background Declared*
Disability Living Allowance		
Chair	Mrs Anne Spaight	—
Member	Mrs Simone Baker	—
Member	Dr. David Cohen	—
Member	Mrs Jean Cooper	—
Member	Mrs Judith Holt	—
Member	Ms Marilyn Howard	—
Member	Dr. Lee Illis	—
Member	Dr. John Keen	—
Member	Dr. Ben Ko	Yes
Member	Dr. Richard Lucas	—
Member	Dr. Ian McGill	—
Member	Dr. Audrey Oppenheim	—
Member	Mrs Claire Poole	—
Member	Professor David Scott	—
Member	Miss Cynthia Smith	—
Member	Mrs Marion Westacott	—
Member	Mrs Christine Whitehead	—
Industrial Injuries Advisory Council		
Chair	Professor Anthony Newman Taylor	—
Member	Dr. Mark Britton	—
Member	Dr. Ian Brown	—
Member	Dr. Anne Cockcroft	—
Member	Professor David Coggan	—
Member	Mr. Gordon Ifill	Yes
Member	Mrs Diana Kloss	—
Member	Dr. Ian Lawson	—
Member	Dr. Simon Levene	—
Member	Dr. Keith Palmer	—
Member	Mr. Mark Platt	—
Member	Mr. Hugh Robertson	—
Member	Dr. Lesley Rushton	—
Member	Ms Jenny Thurston	—
Member	Mr. Owen Tudor	—
Member	Dr. Derek White	—
Member	Dr. Lucille Wright	—
Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority		
Chair	Mrs Harriet Maunsell OBE	—
Member	Mr. David Adams OBE	—
Member	Ms Wendy Beaver	—
Member	Miss Belinda Benny	—
Member	Mr. Hugh Brown	—
Member	Mr. Duncan Campbell	—
Member	Mr. Laurie Edmans	—
Member	Mr. Mike Jones	—
Member	Miss Myra Kinghorn	—
Member	Mrs Mary MacLeod	—
Member	Ms Joanne Segars	—
Social Security Advisory Committee		
Chair	Sir Thomas Boyd-Carpenter KBE	—
Member	Mr. Neil Barlow	—
Member	Mrs Elisabeth Elias	—
Member	Dr. Angus Erskine	—
Member	Mr. Richard Excell OBE	—
Member	Mrs Ros Gardner	—
Member	Mrs Alison Garnham	—
	Dr. Christine Kendrick	—
Member	Dr. Piu-Ling	—
Member	Professor Eithne McLaughlin FRSA	—
Member	Mr. Laurie Naumann	—
	Professor Anthony Ogus CBE	—
Member	Professor Robert Walker	—

Notes:
The table contains the names of chairs and members of the groups requested. The appointees noted as being from an ethnic background have given their consent for this information to be released.

Seasonal Unemployment

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proposals he has for addressing seasonal unemployment fluctuations in seaside towns; and if he will make a statement. [124772]

Mr. Browne: In a dynamic economy, like the UK, jobs begin and end frequently and we cannot legislate to prevent change. Seaside towns suffer more seasonal fluctuation, but this can be reduced over time as broader employment bases are established. However, where there are job losses, the people affected need help and support to find a new job as quickly as possible—whatever part of the economy they work in.

Jobcentre Plus is providing everyone of working age with advice and guidance on the full range of support available to help them move into work, including where this need is as a result of seasonal fluctuations. For those who need more help, we have introduced a wide range of programmes and initiatives designed to tackle the barriers that can prevent individuals from returning to work. We are making sure that people who become unemployed get back into employment as soon as possible.

These policies have contributed to a reduction in unemployment across the country. For example, in Torbay, 2,277 people have been helped into work through the New Deals and the percentage of the working-age population in Torbay who were unemployed and claiming benefit has fallen from 5.8 per cent. in May 1997 to 2.9 per cent. in May 2003.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on how many occasions between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [126671]

Maria Eagle: Departmental special advisers travelled abroad on one occasion to Boston and Washington, USA at a cost of £4,900.00.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many staff in his Department were on long-term sick leave in each of the last five years; [109244]

(2) how many staff in the Department have been on long-term sick leave in each of the last two years. [115866]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested.

The Department for Work and Pensions was created in June 2001 but statistics for the new Department as a whole have only been available since April 2002. Statistics for the former Department of Social Security are also not available.

Such information is available as follows:

Long-term sick leave is defined as absences lasting 28 working days and over.

13,853 people out of 166,286 (8.3 per cent.) in the Department have taken one spell of long-term sickness absence between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2003.

A further 2,504 people in the Department have taken at least two spells of long-term sickness absence between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2003.

This is summarised below:

Number of spells	*Number of people*
1	13,853
2	2,154
3	303
4	35
5	9
6	3

Standard Local Housing Allowance

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what size of geographical area he will determine as appropriate in setting the standard local housing allowance to ensure that it properly reflects the local market; [118488]

(2) what plans he has to ensure that tenants' views are taken into account in the level set in their locality for the standard local housing allowance. [118491]

Malcolm Wicks: Standard local housing allowances in the 10 Pathfinder authorities will be calculated across a Broad Rental-Market Area. This will be based on the current concept of a locality, which is used to determine Local Reference Rents and Single Room Rents.

As with localities, a Broad Rental Market Area will reflect a rent officer's judgment about the area in which someone could reasonably be expected to live while having access to amenities of a similar standard. Therefore, the area covered will depend on local conditions rather than pre-determined geographical size.

The information on which rent officers' decisions are based is collected from a wide range of sources. Although they are under no duty to formally consult with anyone when setting localities and calculating Local Reference Rents (or Single Room Rents), rent officers welcome discussion and information from any interested party. They currently do this by holding regular meetings with local landlords' forums and tenants' groups. Similarly, although there will be no duty for rent officers to consult with tenants or other third parties when setting Broad Rental Market Areas and calculating Standard Local Housing Allowances, they will continue to welcome discussion.

Tax Credits

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he and his Department have *(a)* made and *(b)* put into action to extend entitlement for application to budgeting and crisis loans to those in receipt of tax credits; and if he will make a statement. [126108]

Mr. Pond: Social fund budgeting loans target help on the neediest people in our society who qualify for income-related benefits.

All families who move from income support or jobseeker's allowance to child tax credit only will be entitled to the maximum amount of child tax credit up to an annual household income of £13,230. These families can therefore gain considerably from the introduction of the child tax credit.

Crisis loans will continue to be available to anyone in an emergency, or as a consequence of a disaster where there is no other means of preventing serious damage or serious risk to their health or safety or that of their family. There is no requirement for a crisis loan applicant to be receiving an income-related benefit, but any income or capital they have will be taken into account.

Widowers

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to meet representatives of widowers' groups to discuss issues affecting widowers' pensions; [117120]

(2) what recent representations he has received on the granting of back-payments of widowers' pensions. [118777]

Mr. Pond: There are still a number of cases before both the European Court of Human Rights and the domestic courts involving widowers. The UK is defending on a number of aspects of these cases and their outcome will inevitably affect the Government's decisions in dealing with all the widowers affected. We cannot say when all the judgments are going to be available, nor can we speculate about the outcomes. In these circumstances it would not be appropriate to meet individuals or groups potentially affected by the litigation.

We have received a number of representations about the April 2001 reform of support in bereavement and the action taken in the Courts by some individuals. We have replied to all these representations.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Department since 29 October 2002. [126620]

Maria Eagle: We have issued 71 written ministerial statements.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

BBC Charter

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had on renewal of the BBC's Charter. [125079]

Tessa Jowell: I am now considering the best way to conduct the Charter Review process. As I indicated in the House on 14 July, we intend to publish proposals on the Charter Review process before Christmas. The process will be wide-ranging and thorough and will provide a number of opportunities for public debate.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much was spent by her Department and agencies for which her Department is responsible in each of the last five years to promote *(a)* Northumberland and *(b)* the north-east as a tourist destination. [126450]

Mr. Caborn: The British Tourist Authority (BTA) was responsible for marketing Britain overseas as a tourist destination over the last five years. It did not allocate funds for individual regions (or sub-regions) of Britain, but promoted Britain as a whole in a way which maximised the impact of its campaigns in individual markets overseas. DCMS allocated the following amounts to the BTA in the last five years:

	Grant (£ million)
1998–99	35
1999–2000	36
2000–01	37
2001–02	35.5
2002–03	35.5

In addition, £14.2 million was awarded in 2001–02. A further £20 million was allocated from the Reserve in 2002–03 to help tourism recover from the impact of the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak and the 11 September attacks and to drive forward a strategy.

In 2001–02, DCMS allocated to the English Tourism Council (ETC) £3.8 million from the Reserve to assist the domestic recovery of tourism following FMD; over half that amount was passed to the 10 Regional Tourist Boards in England, including the Northumbria Tourist Board, whose activities cover Northumberland and the north-east, and much of it was used for promotional activities. Other central Government funding provided to the Northumbria Tourist Board in those years via the ETC was for the delivery of the national tourism strategy at regional level, and did not include money for marketing.

Elite Athletes Funding Group

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on completion of the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the Elite Athletes Funding Group Report. [126332]

Mr. Caborn: The Elite Sports Funding Review made over 50 recommendations, the large majority of which are for the Sports Councils and National Governing Bodies of sport to take forward. The Review was discussed at the Sports Cabinet on 31 October 2001, chaired by the Secretary of State. The Cabinet brings together the Sports Ministers and Chairmen of the Sports Councils from each of the Devolved Administrations. At the Cabinet, the Sports Councils accepted and are now implementing the overwhelming majority of the recommendations.

Following the recent Spending Review, a ring fenced allocation of £4.7 million for 2004–05 and 2005–06 has been provided to UK Sport to enable them to take forward some of the outstanding recommendations that involved an increase in expenditure. Some of the recommendations relate to the World Class Plans and cannot be implemented until the current 4-year Plans have been completed. DCMS will continue to work with UK Sport, the Devolved Administrations and Sport England to ensure that implementation of the recommendations is effective and continues to remain relevant to the changing environment of high performance sport.

European Constitution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with *(a)* colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and *(b)* counterparts in the European Union about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European constitution. [124780]

Mr. Caborn: As part of the normal Whitehall process, DCMS Ministers and officials have had regular correspondence with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss all aspects of the Convention, including legislative competences. We have also had regular contact with Member and Accession States to discuss issues arising in the Convention. In line with exemptions 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the normal practice of Governments to disclose details about internal discussions, or information whose disclosure would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs.

Lottery Grants

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to make science and education new criteria for lottery grants. [126735]

Estelle Morris: I have no immediate plans to make changes. The New Opportunities Fund has responsibility for education funding from the Lottery and the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts has responsibility for science.

National Stadium

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what efforts are being made to ensure that all the timber being used in the construction of the new stadium at Wembley comes from legal and sustainable sources; and if she will make a statement. [126025]

Mr. Caborn: In my answer to my Hon. Friend's question on 26 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 602–03, I explained that the National Football Stadium is a Football Association project which is being delivered by its wholly owned subsidiary company Wembley National Stadium Ltd. The Government's policy that its central Departments and agencies should actively seek to buy timber from legal and sustainable sources does not therefore apply to the building of the national stadium.

Wembley National Stadium Ltd. have however agreed under the terms of Sport England's Lottery Funding agreement to have regard to obtaining materials from sustainable or renewable sources. Multiplex Construction (UK) who are building the stadium have environmental plans in place to honour this obligation which extends to sub-contractors. Multiplex have confirmed to Wembley National Stadium Ltd. that they will continue to monitor the source of timber products used throughout the duration of the project.

OFCOM

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many members of staff at Ofcom earn more than £100,000 per annum. [126317]

Estelle Morris: Nine members of staff working within Ofcom currently fall in this category.

Physical Exercise (Northumberland Schools)

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of school children in the Northumberland local education authority area receive a minimum of two hours physical exercise and school sport per week. [126452]

Mr. Caborn: This information is not currently held in the format requested and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on how many occasions between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisors have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [126673]

Mr. Caborn: No departmental or non-departmental travel abroad was undertaken by any Special Advisors for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport between the periods of 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003.

All travel undertaken by Special Advisers is undertaken fully in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Sports Funding

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the value of Sport England's Exchequer grant aid was to each national governing body in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02, *(c)* 2002–03 and *(d)* 2003–04. [125220]

Mr. Caborn: The figures are shown in the following table.

£

Governing body grants	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04
Angling—National Federation of Anglers	45,625	80,500	40,000	43,000
Angling—National Federation of Sea Anglers	30,000	38,250	47,500	49,000
Angling—Salmon and Trout Association	25,000	32,000	40,000	43,000
Archery—Grand National Archery Society	0	0	0	15,000
Association Football—Football Association	132,000	108,000	0	144,000
Athletics—Amateur Athletics	193,000	293,000	293,000	315,000
Badminton—Badminton Association	280,000	280,000	280,000	280,000
Basketball—EBBA	457,500	473,334	491,833	450,000
Boxing—Amateur Boxing Association	49,333	98,001	46,107	91,666
Canoeing—British Canoe Union	200,000	200,000	200,000	200,000
Cricket—England and Wales Cricket Board	262,250	284,500	207,125	179,000
Cycling—British Cycling Federation	270,000	270,000	202,500	270,000
Equestrian—British Equestrian Federation	40,000	40,000	42,500	50,000
Fencing—British Fencing Association	45,000	50,000	50,000	50,000
Fitness—Exercise Association	28,000	0	0	0
Golf—Golf Foundation	94,000	92,000	92,000	92,000
Gymnastics—British Amateur Gymnastics	200,000	200,999.8	200,000	200,000
Hockey—English Hockey Foundation	470,000	450,000	450,000	450,000
Ice Skating—National Ice Skating	25,000	16,750	13,750	15,000
Judo—British Judo Association	79,551	121,000	125,000	125,000
Karate—English Karate	31,250	16,250	0	35,000
Lacrosse—English Lacrosse Association	213,750	151,250	140,000	140,000
Mountaineering—British Mountaineering Council	72,778	65,000	65,000	65,000
Movement and Dance—English Amateur Dance	8,500	8,500	8,500	8,500
Movement and Dance—English Folk Dance and Song Society	17,000	17,000	17,000	17,000
Movement and Dance—Health and Beauty Exercise	15,000	15,500	15,500	15,000
Movement and Dance—Keep Fit Association	37,333	36,667	36,000	36,000
Movement and Dance—Margaret Morris Movement	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Movement and Dance—CCPR	27,913	42,000	41,870	14,000
Movement and Dance—Medau Society	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000
Netball—All England Netball Association	447,500	460,000	443,375	430,000
Rowing—Amateur Rowing Association	200,000	250,000	262,500	262,500
Rugby League—British Amateur Rugby League Association	320,000	320,000	150,000	130,000
Rugby League Joint Policy Board	0	0	190,000	190,000
Rugby Football—Rugby Football Union	297,188	225,312	200,000	200,000
Rugby Football—RFU for Women	131,666	150,000	141,333	139,000
Sailing—Royal Yachting Association	100,000	130,000	130,000	130,000
Shooting—English Shooting Council	7,000	24,125	4,875	1,500
Skiing—English Skiing Council	50,000	30,000	50,000	40,000
Squash—Squash Rackets Association	252,500	242,500	307,119.8	240,000
Swimming—Amateur Swimming Association	330,000	340,000	340,000	340,000
Table Tennis—English Table Tennis Association	450,000	435,000	435,000	435,000
Triathlon—British Triathlon Association	30,000	40,000	75,000	60,000
Volleyball—English Volleyball Association	208,000	208,000	208,000	208,000
Water Skiing—British Water Ski Federation	35,000	35,000	38,000	35,000
Weightlifting—British Weightlifters Association	40,000	39,999	40,001	40,000
Wrestling—British Wrestling Association	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Petanque—British Petanque Association	3,750	0	5,000	5,000
Caving—National Caving Association	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Handball—British Handball Association	7,000	7,000	7,000	7,000
Orienteering—British Orienteering Association	82,500	90,000	90,000	90,000
Rounders—National Rounders Association	23,500	32,000	32,000	32,000
Surfing—Surf Life Saving Association	6,787	4,612	8,750	7,000
Real Tennis—Tennis and Rackets Association	12,000	12,000	8,000	8,000
Tug-Of-War	4,567	6,583	3,250	3,000
Softball—British Softball Association	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
Yoga—British Wheel of Yoga	7,084	10,000	10,000	10,000
Baseball—Baseball Federation	16,000	16,001	15,000	16,000
British Roller Sports Federation	—	0	0	20,000
English Ice Hockey Association	—	0	0	20,000
Modern Pentathlon Association of Great Britain	—	0	0	5,000
	6,481,825	6,658,634	6,409,389	6,566,166

Tourism

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much her Department has allocated for the promotion of tourism in the UK in 2003–04. [126516]

Mr. Caborn: This Department has allocated over £54 million this year in order to promote tourism in Britain to both the overseas and domestic markets, as follows

	£ million
2003–04	
VisitBritain grant-in-aid	
Overseas promotion	35.5
Domestic promotion	10.4
Transition funds for reform	2.0
Total	47.9
Other	
RDAs	3.6
London	1.9
EnglandNet (Invest to Save)	1.2
Tourism total	54.6

In addition, DCMS spends over £1 billion per year on, for example, the arts, royal parks and palaces, museums and galleries, much of which directly benefits tourism.

Tourism (Northumberland)

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people were employed in the tourism industry in Northumberland in each of the last five years. [126725]

Mr. Caborn: The information requested is not available. Employment statistics for the tourism industry are available only for the whole of Great Britain and for England. The most recent data are for June 2002. These are shown in the following table with the figures for the previous four years.

Employment in the tourism related industries[1] in Great Britain and England

As at June	*Number of jobs[2] in Great Britain*	*Number of jobs in England*
1998	1,990,000	1,560,000
1999	2,070,000	1,780,000
2000	2,140,000	1,830,000
2001	2,160,000	1,820,000
2002	2,180,000	1,830,000

[1] The tourism-related industries are short-stay accommodation, restaurants and cafes, bars and nightclubs, travel agencies and tour operators, libraries, museums and other cultural activities, sport and other recreation activities.
[2] Includes both employees and the self-employed.
Source:
DCMS analysis of National Statistics Sources.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Department since 29 October 2002. [126619]

Mr. Caborn: As of 16 July 2003, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport had made 31 written ministerial statements since 29 October 2002.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Commission on Intellectual Property Rights

Syd Rapson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what steps are being taken to implement the recommendations of the Commission on Intellectual Property Rights, on protecting *(a)* the material in (i) gene banks and (ii) farmers' fields from being directly patented and *(b)* the rights of farmers to follow traditional practices of reusing, exchanging and informally selling seeds in developing countries. [125901]

Hilary Benn: Access to material in gene banks and in farmers' fields, and the criteria under which patents may be obtained on such material, is governed by national legislation. Under TRIPS, plants as such may be excluded from patentability, as also may conventional plant breeding processes. Plant varieties may be covered by patents or other effective sui generis protection systems. The criteria for patentability applying in most countries would prevent the direct patenting of material in farmers' fields.

The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, when it comes into effect, will establish a Multilateral System on Access and Benefit Sharing for a list of food and fodder plants. The ability to take out intellectual property rights on material in gene banks covered by the Treaty in the form received is specifically excluded.

The UK has signed the International Treaty and hopes to ratify it, together with all other EU member states, before the end of this year. It will come into effect 90 days after the 40th ratification of, or accession to, the Treaty. In its response to the Commission report, published in May, the government urged all other countries that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Treaty as soon as possible.

The Government supports the right of developing countries to legislate to provide for the re-use, exchange and informal sale of seeds by farmers.

Debt Relief

Mr. Caton: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how the Department will help ensure that the UK's beyond heavily indebted poor countries additional debt relief will be used to tackle poverty in indebted countries. [125816]

Hilary Benn: Before a country can qualify for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, it must produce an interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) at Decision Point—the first stage of the HIPC process—setting out what action it will take to develop a full PRSP. To reach Completion Point—the final stage when the relief becomes irrevocable—the full PRSP must be in place, and under implementation for at least one year. The PRSP sets out the policy action governments are taking to reduce poverty, and also provides a budgetary framework not only for spending the savings from debt relief but also for allocating all other aid and government revenue so that they have the greatest impact on poverty reduction.

We believe strongly in the value of the PRSP process, which is leading to improved economic management and social reform. The UK Government goes further than is required under HIPC and provides 100 per cent. debt relief to countries when they qualify for HIPC relief. In addition, all payments received by HMG from HIPC countries will be held in trust and returned to

countries when they qualify for HIPC relief, so that they can invest more resources in poverty reduction programmes. For the 26 countries that have qualified for HIPC so far, spending on education and health in these countries is set to rise by some US$4 billion each year. On average, their debts will be reduced by around two-thirds, and social expenditure will be nearly four times higher than spending on debt servicing. The UK is also aligning its bilateral development assistance programmes with the PRSPs.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what the cost was to his Department for *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers, *(b)* taxis, *(c)* train travel, *(d)* the use of helicopters, *(e)* airline tickets and *(f)* chartered aeroplanes in each year since 1997. [123090]

Hilary Benn: All official travel is undertaken in accordance with the rules contained in DFID's staff handbook. All ministerial travel is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the "Ministerial Code" and "Travel by Ministers", copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Information on the costs of categories *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(f)* chartered planes, in respect of ministerial travel, is being provided centrally by the Cabinet Office in response to a parallel question. The detailed information requested for category *(d)* is not separately recorded and could be provided only at disproportionate cost but is likely to be small.

For category *(b)* DFID currently has two taxi contracts, with a combined cost for 2002 of £108,211. We do not hold central records of taxi costs paid to other companies and claimed for by individual members of staff.

For categories *(c)* and *(e)*, for bookings made in the UK through DFID's HQ-based travel implant, the cost to DFID during the last three calendar years was:

Cost of rail and airline bookings

£

	2000	*2001*	*2002*
Rail	265,00	308,000	346,000
Airlines	7,900,000	8,400,000	9,800,000

The figures for categories c) and e) do not include spending on travel by overseas offices, booked through an overseas travel agent.

Kenya

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will list the educational projects in Kenya which have received funding from his Department *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly in 2002–03. [125550]

Hilary Benn: DFID provided direct funding for two education projects in Kenya in 2002–03; the Education for Empowerment project, and the Strengthening Primary Education project (Phase 3). DFID also provides funding for education through multilateral channels, but information on this is not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Montserrat

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development (1) what the average waiting time for hospital treatment is in Montserrat; [126065]

(2) how many people there are on a hospital waiting list in Montserrat; [126068]

(3) how many doctors there are per head of population in Montserrat. [126064]

Hilary Benn: The government of Montserrat are responsible for health matters on island. However, due to the recent volcanic events on Montserrat, it is not possible to provide an answer to the above questions in the time available. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what the average class size is in Montserrat, broken down by age group. [126066]

Hilary Benn: The Government of Montserrat is responsible for education matters on the island. However, due to recent volcanic events on Montserrat, it is not possible to provide an answer to the above question in the time available. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Caton: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what plans the Department has to facilitate the development of mutually beneficial partnerships between donors and non-governmental organisations working to assist people in developing nations. [125817]

Hilary Benn: DFID has significant involvement with a wide range of NGOs and other civil society organisations. In 2001–02, we entered into funding partnerships with over 130 UK based NGOs providing financial support of over £190 million. These partnerships involve working in a wide variety of ways, ranging from humanitarian assistance to Partnership Programme Agreements, which are strategic agreements that provide support for mutually agreed development objectives.

There are regular meetings with British Overseas NGOs for Development (BOND), the umbrella membership organisation representing UK NGOs active in international development, and individual NGOs to discuss issues of policy and procedures.

DFID officials are active participants at the EC Member States Working Group on NGO co-financing, that is considering how best to build mutually beneficial partnerships with NGOs. We also maintain relations with other donors, both centrally and through our various offices in the developing world.

Private Office Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what the running costs have been of Ministers' private offices in his Department in each year since 1997. [123113]

Hilary Benn: It is difficult to separate out completely DFID's expenditure on the running costs of Minister's Private Offices from that of Top Management Group as a whole. However, best estimates for DFID Ministers' Private Office running costs (including staff costs of the parliamentary and correspondence units) for 2001–02 are, £838,040 and 2002–03 are £1,156,445. Estimated costs for previous years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

World Trade Organisation

Syd Rapson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what steps will be taken at the next World Trade Organisation meeting on promoting the freedom of developing countries to choose the path of trade liberalisation best suited to its particular circumstances for achieving sustainable development and poverty reduction. [125899]

Hilary Benn: The Government are committed to delivering on our commitments to make the current round of WTO trade negotiations truly a "Development Round". With the European Commission, we are actively working to secure a substantial package of Special and Differential Treatment measures to ensure that any agreements negotiated take full account of the specific needs of individual countries, and are supported by targeted trade related capacity building. We will do all we can to ensure that, through the European Commission, the next WTO ministerial meeting in Cancun makes real progress with the so-called Doha Development Agenda.

The UK Government are also providing a wide-ranging programme of Trade Related Capacity Building designed to help developing countries formulate and implement their own trade development strategies, stimulate trade, and help them participate in and benefit from the institutions, negotiations and processes that shape national trade policy and the rules and practices of international commerce.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Council Housing (North-East Lincolnshire)

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the total cost of bringing all council housing in north-east Lincolnshire up to decent housing standards by 2010. [126420]

Keith Hill: It is for Local Authorities to determine the level of non-decent housing in their areas based on robust stock condition information. The 2002 Statistical Return from north-east Lincolnshire indicates that there are approximately 3,000 non-decent dwellings. The 2002 Statistical Return provided by the local authority estimated that it would cost £9 million to bring all these dwellings up to the decent homes standard.

General Elections

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he has held discussions with the Electoral Commission about the possibility of abandoning alphabetical listing of candidates on ballot papers *(a)* at future general elections and *(b)* in the London Mayoral and Assembly elections. [125421]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

We have had no discussions with the Electoral Commission on changing the present procedure for listing candidates' names on ballot papers to be used at future general elections or the London Mayoral and Assembly elections. The Commission has recommended in its recently published 'Ballot Paper Design' that alternative listing systems should be tested through pilot schemes to assist them in determining the impact of the present arrangements. The Government are currently considering this recommendation along with all the other recommendations the Commission has recently made on reforming the electoral process.

House Prices

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether in valuing dwellings for council tax purposes, it is his policy that district valuers should take into account changing values over time of house prices within a given locality; and if he will make a statement on the construction of time services and deflators for such purposes. [125645]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 14 July 2003]:* I have been asked to reply.

The current Council Tax bands contained within valuation lists are based upon property values as at 1 April 1991. The Listing Officers of the Valuation Office Agency, who are statutorily responsible for the lists, will use a range of evidence to support the bands ascribed to each property. However, the strongest evidence is property sales evidence which was available close to the valuation date. Other information, such as property indices, are utilised as a check mechanism but are often generalist in nature and must be used with care when dealing with an individual property, or an area, which may have changed character over the ensuing 10 or more years.

The Local Government Bill currently before Parliament will provide for a council tax revaluation at least every 10 years. The first revaluation in England will have a valuation date of 1 April 2005 with the new lists coming into force on 1 April 2007. The Valuation Office Agency will undertake the revaluation.

Housing

Mr. Betts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of whether the decent homes target will be met by 2010. [126166]

Keith Hill: Since 1996 the number of non-decent homes in the social sector has been reduced by over 700,000. Forward plans from local authorities show that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is on track to meet targets of reducing, by a third, the number of non-decent social homes between April 2001 and April 2004. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is also now on

track for all dwellings owned by local authorities and registered social landlords to meet the decent homes standard by 2010.

The number of vulnerable private sector households in non-decent homes has been reduced by 400,000 since 1996.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which local authorities have not transferred their stock or set up an arm's length management organisation with PFI scheme. [126127]

Keith Hill: Tabled as follows are those local authorities by region that have not transferred all of their stock. Local authorities that have transferred some of their stock are marked with a (P). Those authorities that have been given places on the 2003 transfer programme are highlighted.

Local authorities that have either set up an ALMO or are on the programme are also highlighted.

The table also highlights the two local authorities that have signed a PFI contract to date, as well as marking those that are on the PFI pathfinder programme.

Region	*LA name*
East of England	Barbergh
	Basildon (P)
	Braintree
	Brentwood
	Broxbourne
	Cambridge
	Castle Point
	Colchester (Provisional allocation on the Round 2 ALMO programme but has yet to be granted section 27 consent)
	Dacorum
	Epping Forest
	Fenland
	Forest Health (2003 Transfer Programme)
	Great Yarmouth
	Harlow
	Ipswich
	Kings Lynn and West Norfolk
	Luton
	Mid Suffolk
	North Norfolk
	Norwich
	Peterborough (2003 Transfer Programme)
	Rochford
	South Bedfordshire
	South Cambridgeshire
	South Norfolk
	Southend-on-Sea
	St. Albans
	Stevenage
	Tendring
	Three Rivers
	Thurrock
	Uttlesford
	Watford
	Waveney
	Welwyn Hatfield
East Midlands	*Ashfield (ALMO set up)*
	Bassetlaw
	Blaby
	Bolsover
	Broxtowe
	Charnwood
	Chesterfield
	Corby
	Daventry
	Derby (ALMO set up)
	Gedling
	Harborough
	High Peak
	Hinckley and Bosworth
	Kettering
	Leicester
	Lincoln
	Mansfield
	Melton
	Newark and Sherwood
	North East Derbyshire (PFI pathfinder)
	North Kesteven
	North West Leicestershire
	Northampton
	Nottingham City
	Oadby and Wigston
	Rutland
	South Derbyshire
	South Holland
	South Kesteven
	South Northamptonshire
	Wellingborough
London	Barking and Dagenham (2003 Transfer Programme)
	Barnet
	Brent (ALMO)
	Camden (PFI pathfinder)
	City of London
	Croydon
	Ealing
	Enfield (P)
	Greenwich (P)
	Hackney (P) (2003 Transfer Programme)
	Hammersmith and Fulham (P)
	Haringey
	Harrow (P)
	Havering
	Hillingdon (ALMO—awaiting inspection)
	Hounslow (ALMO set up)
	Islington (P) (has signed a PFI contract) (2003 Transfer Programme)
	Kensington and Chelsea (ALMO set up)
	Kingston upon Thames (2003 Transfer Programme)
	Lambeth (P) (2003 Transfer Programme)
	Lewisham
	Merton (P)
	Newham (PFI pathfinder)
	Redbridge
	Southwark
	Sutton
	Tower Hamlets (P) (2003 Transfer Programme)
	Waltham Forest (ALMO awaiting inspection)
	Wandsworth
	Westminster (ALMO set up)
North East	Alnwick
	Berwick-upon-Tweed
	Blyth Valley (ALMO set up)
	Castle Morpeth
	Chester-le-Street
	Darlington
	Derwentside
	Durham
	Easington
	Gateshead
	Hartlepool (2003 Transfer Programme)
	Middlesbrough (2003 Transfer Programme)
	Newcastle upon Tyne
	North Tyneside
	Sedgefield
	South Tyneside
	Stockton-on-Tees (ALMO set up)
	Teesdale
	Wansbeck
	Wear Valley
North West	Barrow-in-Furness
	Blackpool
	Bolton (ALMO awaiting inspection)
	Chorley
	Copeland
	Ellesmere Port and Neston
	Halton

Region	LA name
	Hyndburn
	Lancaster
	Liverpool (P)
	Macclesfield
	Manchester (P) (has signed PFI contract)
	(2003 Transfer Programme)
	Oldham (ALMO set up)
	Pendle
	Preston (P)
	Ribble Valley
	Rochdale (ALMO set up)
	Rossendale
	Salford (ALMO awaiting inspection)
	Sefton
	South Lakeland
	Stockport
	Trafford (2003 Transfer Programme)
	Warrington
	West Lancashire
	Wigan (ALMO set up)
	Wirral (P) (2003 Transfer Programme)
South East	Adur
	Arun
	Ashford
	Aylesbury Vale
	Bracknell Forest
	Brighton and Hove
	Canterbury
	Cherwell (P)
	Crawley
	Dartford
	Dover
	Eastbourne
	Fareham
	Gosport
	Gravesham
	Guildford
	Lewes
	Maidstone
	Milton Keynes
	Mole Valley
	New Forest
	Oxford
	Portsmouth
	Reading (PFI pathfinder)
	Runnymede
	Shepway
	Slough
	Southampton
	Tandridge
	Thanet
	The Medway Towns
	Waverley
	Wealden
	Winchester
	Woking
	Wokingham
	Wycombe
South West	Bournemouth
	Bristol
	Caradon
	Carrick (ALMO awaiting inspection)
	Cheltenham (ALMO awaiting inspection)
	East Devon
	Exeter
	Gloucester
	Isles of Scilly
	Mid Devon
	North Cornwall
	North Somerset
	Plymouth
	Poole
	Purbeck (2003 Transfer Programme)
	Salisbury
	Sedgemoor
	South Gloucestershire
	Stroud (2003 Transfer Programme)
	Swindon
	Taunton Deane
	Teignbridge
	Torridge
West Midlands	Birmingham (P)
	Bridgnorth
	Bromsgrove
	Cannock Chase
	Dudley
	North Shropshire
	North Warwickshire
	Nuneaton and Bedworth
	Oswestry
	Redditch
	Rugby
	Sandwell (PFI pathfinder)
	Solihull
	Stafford
	Stoke-on-Trent (P)
	Tamworth
	Walsall (P)
	Warwick
	Wolverhampton
	Worcester
Yorkshire and Humber	Barnsley (ALMO awaiting inspection)
	Doncaster
	East Riding of Yorkshire
	Harrogate
	Kingston upon Hull
	Kirklees (ALMO set up)
	Leeds (6 partial ALMOs set up) (PFI pathfinder)
	North East Lincolnshire (2003 Transfer Programme)
	North Lincolnshire
	Richmondshire
	Rotherham
	Scarborough
	Selby
	Sheffield
	Wakefield (2003 Transfer Programme)
	York

Mr. Betts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his estimate is of the time required by a local housing authority from the initial consideration of options to *(a)* complete a stock transfer, *(b)* reach agreement on and sign a PFI contract and *(c)* prepare for and complete establishment of an arm's length management organisation. [126128]

Keith Hill: The length of time taken to implement an option will depend on the option chosen and the circumstances of each individual local authority. However the following timescales can be used as a rough guide for future schemes:

Transfer—28 months from application to transfer

PFI—the pathfinder schemes have taken up to three years from application to contract signature, we aim to reduce this timescale to 18 months using lessons learned from the pathfinders.

ALMO—15 months from ALMO bid to being inspected and, if successful, securing additional funds.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to announce Government proposals on the way forward for housing capital finance following the recent consultation. [126130]

Keith Hill: The decisions reached on the issues consulted on in 'The Way Forward for Housing Capital Finance' are reflected in "Sustainable Communities: building for the future" and the Local Government Bill currently before Parliament. A letter went to all Chief Finance Officers in local housing authorities in England on 1 April setting out in detail the proposed

arrangements for the proposals consulted on. This letter is available at www.odpm.gov.uk and in the Library of the House.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how the scheme funding requirements to meet the decent homes standard as a result of the change from fitness standard to the health and safety rating system will be financed. [126132]

Keith Hill: It is too early to say what will be the financial impact of applying the housing health and safety rating system to the decent home standard when the fitness standard is abolished. The cost of rectifying health and safety hazards will vary, and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister expects many of them to be put right relatively quickly and cheaply. Guidance to authorities on the assessment of decency using the rating system will be issued.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the number of houses which will be brought up to the decent homes standard in each year up to 2010, broken down by the method of finance to be used. [126133]

Keith Hill: The following table shows the estimated year on year change in the numbers of non-decent social sector homes from the baseline date of April 2001 to the target date of December 2010. The extent to which these numbers will be made up of ALMO/PFI/transfer schemes will depend on the results of the option appraisal process that each local authority is currently undertaking. This process is due to be completed by July 2005. In broad terms we have estimated that transfers will tackle between 200,000 and 250,000, ALMOs will tackle between 300,000 and 350,000 and PFI will tackle between 15,000 and 30,000 non-decent homes.

	Remaining number of non-decent dwellings owned by local authorities and RSLs
April 2001	1,600,000
2002	1,450,000
2003	1,250,000
2004	1,100,000
2005	900,000
2006	700,000
2007	500,000
2008	400,000
2009	250,000
2010	100,000
December 2010	0

Mr. Betts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what conclusions he has drawn from the National Audit Office report on the costs of the large scale voluntary transfer programme. [126163]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has concluded that the National Audit Office report Improving Social Housing Through Transfer confirms our belief that the benefits of transfer are clearly visible and worth the costs in ensuring tenants gain from faster renovation of, and improvement to their homes; greater tenant participation in decisions directly affecting their homes and surrounding area; and an increased sense of ownership and involvement in the local regeneration of the wider area.

Loaned Art Works

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many works of art from the Government art collection are on loan to each Minister in his Department. [121794]

Yvette Cooper: There are 86 paintings, prints and engravings on loan from the Government Art Collection to Ministers in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister at this time. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has 39 in his office and Admiralty House. My right hon. Friend the member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford) 0, my hon. Friend the member for Corby (Phil Hope) 18, my right hon. Friend the member for Streatham (Keith Hill) six, my right hon. Friend the Lord Rooker 12 and my office has 11.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Betts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether local authorities which under the Communities Plan do not use the options of stock transfer, Arm's Length Management Organisations or PFI, may receive increased investment in their housing stock above that in the Housing Investment Programme. [126164]

Keith Hill: The Sustainable Communities Plan made it clear that local authorities seeking additional investment in their housing stock are able to choose from three options: stock transfer, PFI and ALMOs.

The plan also made it clear that authorities that do not pursue these options cannot expect increased investment above that provided for in the Housing Investment Programme.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the effect of allocating only 70 per cent. of housing investment programme funding to local authorities as proposed in the Communities Plan; and what effect it will have on the decent homes target. [126165]

Keith Hill: Guidance issued to regional housing boards makes it clear that their allocation proposals should be consistent with the achievement of the decent homes target.

Right to Buy

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister for what reasons local authorities in the South West region were not included on the Government's list of councils which can temporarily suspend the right to buy. [126340]

Keith Hill: There has been no suspension of the Right to Buy in any area. 41 local authority areas were included in the Housing (Right to Buy) (Limits on Discount) (Amendment) Order 2003—Statutory Instrument 2003 No. 498—which came into effect on 27 March 2003. The Order lowered the maximum Right to Buy discount available to tenants from £38,000 (£34,000 in one area) to £16,000 in these areas, which were judged to be under the greatest housing market pressure as evidenced by high levels of homelessness (reflecting high demand for social housing), and high local house prices (reflecting the demand for social housing), and high local house prices (reflecting the demand for private housing and affordability). The

Land Registry lower quartile house price for the third quarter of 2002 was used, to indicate likely availability for first time buyers.

The model was rerun subsequently to take into account local earnings information. The effect was marginal and insufficient to justify further changes.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not wish to reduce the discounts available to tenants unless there is clear evidence of housing pressure on this basis. This did not appear to be the case in any area in the South-West region. The position will be kept under review. In the meantime, the Home Ownership Task Force is looking at the whole range of programmes aimed at helping people into home ownership, including the Right to Buy. The Task Force is due to report this autumn.

Vehicles for Sale

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will extend the Control of Roadside Sales Order to enable local authorities to remove vehicles for sale which are parked on the highway or adjacent greenswards; and if he will make a statement [114654]

Mr. Raynsford: There are no plans to do so.

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what powers are available to local authorities to remove vehicles for sale which are parked on the highway or adjacent greenswards. [114653]

Mr. Raynsford: Under an adoptive code contained in the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, distract councils have extensive and flexible powers to regulate street trading in areas within their jurisdiction. No street trading of any kind can lawfully take place in a prohibited street. Anyone convicted of unlawful street trading can be fined a maximum of £1,000. Officers of borough councils undertake enforcement of the law.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Afghanistan

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place since the Afghan conflict with the US Administration concerning the possible transfer of UK citizens held at Guantanamo Bay to UK custody; and if he will make a statement. [125505]

Mr. Straw: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) today (UIN 125675).

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the result of the invasion of Afghanistan by the coalition on the change on the amount of land used for cultivation of opium poppies; and what he expects the change to be in the level of production in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* the next three years. [126467]

Mr. Rammell: The disruption of drug production and trafficking was not among the aims of the military campaign waged in Afghanistan. Any damage to the drugs trade as a result of coalition activity would be incidental to the principal aims of the campaign and would not be covered in any battle assessments.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) conducts an annual survey into the level of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. They are in the process of completing the 2003 survey. The final results will be available in the autumn. Although it appears that there has been significant displacement of cultivation within Afghanistan, our current expectation is that the total area under poppy cultivation will be broadly similar to that last year. In addition, however, this year's crop has suffered significant damage from moisture-related diseases that are likely to result in a lower opium yield. It is not clear what the size of the Afghan opium crop will be in subsequent years.

Correspondence

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will reply to the letter, dated 28 May, from the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute regarding Julian Gilbey. [126275]

Mr. Mullin: The hon. Member's letter has been passed to my noble Friend Baroness Symons to reply as Minister responsible for consular matters. The reply was signed on 16 July.

EU Constitutional Treaty

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the United Kingdom's opt-out from the Schengen agreement will be maintained in the proposed Constitutional Treaty for the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [126377]

Mr. MacShane: The draft constitution produced by the convention on the future of Europe makes clear that the protocols attached to the treaty will remain an integral part of it. These will include the protocol integrating the Schengen acquis, under which the UK has made a successful application for partial participation. The Government position on the protocols relating to our frontier controls in general and our opt-out from the Schengen Agreement in particular has not changed. We will maintain controls at the UK's frontiers.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the EU directives implemented by the Department since 8 June 2001. [126596]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office plays a coordinating role in the UK's EU policy. It is rarely directly responsible for implementing EC directives. I am not aware of any directives on which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has led on implementation since 8 June 2001.

EU Foreign and Security Policy

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his oral statement of 9 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 1207, on the communitisation of foreign and security policy, if he intends them to become justiciable by the European

Court of Justice and EU supreme court under the proposed EU constitution; and if he will make a statement. [126523]

Mr. MacShane: Under the draft constitution which emerged from the convention, the Common Foreign and Security Policy will not be justiciable by the ECJ, with one exception.

Article III-278 provides that:

"The Court of Justice shall not have jurisdiction with respect to Articles (1–39 and 1–40) and the provisions of (Chapter II of Title V of Part III) concerning the common foreign and security policy."

Article III-17 would, however, give the ECJ jurisdiction in respect of actions brought by persons to challenge the legality of sanctions measures applying to them.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had with President Kirchner of Argentina at the progressive governance conference concerning sovereignty of the Falkland Islands; and if he will make a statement. [126273]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did not meet President Kirchner during his visit.

Brazil

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to propose that Brazil be given a permanent seat at the Security Council of the UN. [126742]

Mr. Rammell: The UK Government support an increase in both the permanent and non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council to ensure that it better reflects the modern world.

We have proposed a model which would include an additional five permanent seats, including one for Latin America. We accept that Brazil is clearly the pre-eminent candidate for that seat when the Security Council is eventually enlarged and we would be very content with that result.

It is primarily for those countries aspiring to permanent membership to make their own case, based on their contribution to international peace and security and the wider goals of the UN. We will continue to advocate our model of Security Council reform with the UN membership.

Global Conflict Prevention

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 12 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 77W, on global conflict prevention pool, what progress has been made in each of the five project areas designed to reduce the number of individuals whose lives are affected by violent conflict. [125676]

Mr. Straw: Monitoring and evaluation of Global Conflict Prevention Pool (GCPP) activity is carried out on the basis of the strategies listed in my answer to the right hon. Member's question of 12 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 77W, and not by the project areas mentioned in that answer. Individual strategies contain a mixture of activity according to the needs of a particular conflict situation or underlying conflict issue.

The Global Pool is beginning to make an impact in meeting the Government's Conflict Prevention Public Service Agreement Target through these strategies. As examples, the Balkans and Afghanistan strategies have helped to establish security and stability, to develop better ethnic relations, democratic and accountable government and to protect human rights through training, capacity building and other support for conflict resolution, establishing the rule of law and Security Sector reform. In Indonesia, the Global Pool has also supported security sector governance issues, human rights training for the Indonesian military, and has trained journalists on accurate and objective reporting of conflict. The strategy on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) aims to prevent the supply, demand and availability of SALW around the globe as a contribution to conflict prevention and supports the UN Programme of Action to combat the illicit trade in SALW. The strategy includes support to the UN Development Programme's global weapons reduction programme and UNDP's work on the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants.

A report on the Global Pool setting out how it operates and describing its geographical and thematic strategies will be published later in the year.

I will write to the right hon. and learned Member on this issue shortly.

Guantanamo Bay

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what conditions are applied to British detainees in Camp Delta receiving food parcels. [124669]

Mr. Mullin: None of the British detainees held at Guantanamo Bay receives food parcels.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times the Government has asked for the return of British prisoners in Guantanamo Bay to Britain; when the most recent request on such matters was; what the US's response was in each case; and if he will make a statement. [125675]

Mr. Straw: We are pressing the US authorities to move forward with the process of determining the future of the British detainees at Guantanamo Bay. We have discussed, and are discussing, a range of options with the US, including the possibility of repatriation. I have discussed this matter on numerous occasions with US Secretary of State Colin Powell; most recently by telephone on Sunday 13 July.

Iraq

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the sale of national assets in Iraq by the Coalition provisional administration. [124313]

Mr. Rammell: Since the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) took over the administration of Iraq, Iraqi oil has been sold by CPA through the Iraqi State Oil Marketing Organisation in accordance with the terms of paragraph 20 of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1483. Under paragraphs 20 and 21 of this resolution, all revenues from sales of Iraqi oil are deposited into the Development Fund for Iraq, less 5 per cent. which is to be deposited into the Iraq Compensation Fund as established under UNSCR 687 of 1991. No other Iraqi assets have been sold by the CPA.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made with establishing the interim authority in Iraq. [125038]

Mr. Rammell: We welcome the formation by Iraqis of the Governing Council—the core of the Iraqi Interim Administration—on 13 July. This is a momentous step that means Iraqis will now play a central role running their country.

The Governing Council is representative of Iraq society and includes a narrow Shia majority, Sunnis and Christians and three women. The Council will work to ensure views of all Iraqis are represented. It delivers a key part of UNSCR 1483.

The Governing Council has real power and will be involved in all key decisions on Iraq's future. It will name the new Ministers in the interim administration, run the Ministries and set the budget for 2004. It will also be responsible for Iraq's representation abroad. Some of the Council's early tasks will be: launching the Constitutional process—written by Iraqis for Iraqis; rebuilding Iraq's infrastructure; restoring security and stability; revitalising the economy and provision of essential services.

In all these activities the Coalition will provide support and advice.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials the Provisional Coalition Administration has in the British controlled sector of Iraq. [125615]

Mr. Rammell: The are currently over 60 officials working for the Coalition Provisional Authority in the British area of operations in Southeast Iraq. Plans are in hand to increase this number.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Department has received from the Russian government on the re-establishment of the electrical power system in Iraq. [125696]

Mr. Rammell: We have received no such representations from the Russian Government.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Ministers were informed that the CIA had counselled the Security and Intelligence Services against including material relating to the alleged procurement of uranium from three African countries in the intelligence dossier published in September 2002; when the CIA communicated the advice to the Security and Intelligence Service; and if he will make a statement. [126328]

Mr. Straw: I shall shortly be writing to the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, in reply to his letter about this matter. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the head of MI6 met Mr. John Humphrys of the BBC since 1 May; who authorised each meeting; and for what purpose each meeting was held. [126464]

Mr. Straw: It is the longstanding practice of successive Governments not to comment on intelligence and security matters. The security and intelligence agencies are outside the scope of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Paragraph 6, Part I).

IT Expenditure

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Foreign Office spent on IT *(a)* licences, *(b)* maintenance, *(c)* software and *(d)* hardware in the last financial year. [125777]

Mr. Rammell: During the 2002–03 financial year, the FCO spent the following on IT:

	£
(a) Licences	1,427,625
(b) Maintenance	12,037,671
(c) Software	6,538,386
(d) Hardware	24,561,014
Total	44,564,696

Middle East

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with *(a)* the Israeli Government and *(b)* the Palestinian Authority regarding the involvement of religious leaders in the Middle East peace process. [124670]

Mr. Rammell: We encourage the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to engage with religious leaders on the Middle East peace process. We recognise the important role religious leaders can play in promoting peace in the region, and we have provided administrative, financial and moral support for continuing inter-faith dialogue stemming from the Alexandria Declaration. The Alexandria Declaration pledges religious leaders to work together to promote a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Montserrat

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many police officers there are per head of population in Montserrat. [126067]

Mr. Rammell: There is one police officer for every 67 people. This is a little higher than the normal police/population ratio given the special need to police the volcano exclusion and daytime entry zones; and because the Montserratian police force carry out other non-core police duties such as port entry control.

Nuclear Weapons (Monitoring)

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what international system of monitoring in which the United Kingdom participates relates to material which may be used for nuclear weapons; and if he will make a statement. [126581]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

The UK is a member of and participates fully in the activities of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is, inter alia, responsible for the international nuclear safeguards regime pursuant to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Civil nuclear material in the UK is subject to both the safeguards requirements of the Euratom Treaty and to the terms of the UK's safeguards agreement with Euratom and the IAEA.

St. Helena

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a Minister in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office last visited St. Helena; and who the Minister was. [126171]

Mr. Rammell: St. Helena has never had a visit by a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister.

United Nations Security Council

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications for the representation of British interests at the UN of the appointment of a single EU representative to the United Nations Security Council. [126000]

Mr. MacShane: The European Union is not a member state of the United Nations and therefore not eligible for election to the UN Security Council.

Visa Applications

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will make available to Clare Anyango and her sponsor Michael Meadows, the explanatory statement of the reasons for the rejection of her application to the High Commission in Nairobi for a visa to study in the United Kingdom made on 17 June 2002. [125939]

Mr. Mullin *[holding answer 16 July 2003]*: I have written to the hon. Member regarding this matter.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visa cases the Minister responsible for entry clearance has overturned since 2001. [125779]

Mr. Mullin: Since January 2001 the Minister responsible for entry clearance has overturned 26 refusal decisions.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many family visit visa applications were *(a)* allowed and *(b)* refused during the last 12 months at High Commission offices in (i) Bangladesh, (ii) India, (iii) Pakistan and (iv) Sri Lanka. [126174]

Mr. Mullin: The information is as follows:

	Family visitor applications issued	*Family visitor applications refused*
Dhaka	2,348	2,939
i. Bangladesh		
Total	2,348	2,939
New Delhi	12,778	9,774
Mumbai	13,296	3,932
Chennai	5,716	447
Kolkutta	2,459	65
ii. India		
Total	34,249	14,218
Islamabad	16,986	3,011
Karachi	1,693	321
iii. Pakistan		
Total	18,679	3,332
Colombo	865	711
iv. Sri Lanka		
Total	865	711

The table shows the number of family visitor visas issued and refused at our visa issuing posts in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka for the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003. The figures for April, May and June 2003 are still being collated. The figures given are the most up-to-date statistics available.

Visa Facilities (Pakistan)

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when full visa facilities will be reintroduced in the Pakistan offices. [125284]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is monitoring developments in Islamabad closely and is personally committed to restoring a full entry clearance operation as soon as practicable.

He has authorised a number of steps that should increase the number of applications that Islamabad, which is handling applications for the whole of Pakistan, can accept.

These include:

rapidly increasing the number of Entry Clearance Officers in Islamabad;

a reorganisation of part of the visa section to speed up the processing of applications;

an increase in the categories that can apply to include those that have travelled to the UK, US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and to fiancés applying to settle in the UK from October;

UK visas taking the primary responsibility for correspondence regarding visa cases in Islamabad with immediate effect.

The Foreign Secretary will be writing to parliamentary colleagues to inform them of our plans imminently. He and I will, of course, continue to keep the situation under close review.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Asbestos

Dr. Cable: To ask the Solicitor-General pursuant to her answer of 16 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 117W, on control of asbestos, if she will list the buildings which have been identified as containing asbestos. [122926]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 4 July 2003]*: The Crown Prosecution Service is unable to provide a list of buildings identified as having an asbestos presence. Although asbestos registers are located at each property, a central register of asbestos information is not in place. The Crown Prosecution Service is addressing this issue in compliance with Regulation 4 of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002.

The Treasury Solicitor's Department's premises, Queen Anne's Chambers, London SW1, and the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers' premises in Buckingham Gate, both contain small amounts of properly identified and managed asbestos.

The buildings occupied by the Serious Fraud Office and HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate do not contain asbestos.

Director of Public Prosecutions

Keith Vaz: To ask the Solicitor-General when a successor to Sir David Calvert-Smith as Director of Public Prosecutions will be announced. [125785]

The Solicitor-General: The process of appointment is currently under way and the Attorney-General expects to be in a position to announce an appointment within a matter of weeks.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many staff in the Department have been on long-term sick leave in each of the last two years. [115849]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 3 June 2003]*: The information is as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The number of staff in the Department who have had periods of long-term sick leave in each of the last two years are listed in the following table:

Long-term sick leave

	Number
2001	886
2002	915

Serious Fraud Office

Number of staff absent due to long-term sick leave. In calculating the figure, 'long-term' was defined as a continuous spell of sick absence lasting four weeks or more.

Long-term sick leave

	Number
2001	3
2002	8

Treasury Solicitor's Department and Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers and HM Crown Prosecution Service

The number of staff taking long-term sick leave in the Treasury Solicitor's Department, Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers and HM Crown Prosecution Service Directorate (defined as one month or more) in the last two years was:

Long-term sick leave

Department	*Number*
2001	
Treasury Solicitor's Department	45
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	1
HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate	1
Total	47
2002	
Treasury Solicitor's Department	41
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	5
HM Crown Prosecution Service Directorate	1
Total	47

HOME DEPARTMENT

Animal Testing

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 4 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 548W, on animal testing, what factors underlay the underspend in the budget available for the development and promotion of alternatives to animal use in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [125282]

Caroline Flint: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 4 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 548W.

The information in the previous answer relating to the spend in financial years 2000–01 to 2002–03 is shown in resource accounting terms. Resource accounting measures the actual value of goods and services received. Previously, the spend was measured in cash accounting terms—this measured the actual money leaving the Home Office's account.

At the end of each of the first of the two years in question there was a certain amount of expenditure for which the goods and services had not been received (termed a "pre-payment"), which was not recorded in the figures provided in resource accounting terms, but would have been recorded in cash accounting terms. The figures, including these pre-payments, are as follows.

£

Financial year	Budget	Actual spend in resource terms	Underspend	Prepayments at end of year
2000–01	265,000	170,203	94,797	108,718
2001–02	280,000	173,906	106,094	112,038
2002–03	280,000	272,104	7,896	6,797

These prepayments affected the situation in 2000–01 and in 2001–02, but by the end of 2002–03 they were minimal, and the spend in resource terms for that year was only £7,896 below the budget. There are several reasons why the projects which constituted prepayments did not start early enough in the financial year to be counted in resource accounting terms. The start of a research project is often delayed. That might be, for example, because the principal researcher takes longer than predicted to identify research assistants. These delays in turn can mean that potential underspends are identified too late for additional projects to be identified, and the work started, before the end of the financial year.

British Overseas Territories

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what responsibilities his Department undertakes in connection with British overseas territories. [123991]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* Under British nationality legislation my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is responsible for nationality issues in the British overseas territories. He delegates a proportion of his certain functions under the Act to the Governors of the territories. The Home Office nevertheless retains an interest in the proper administration of all aspects of the nationality legislation and, in conjunction with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, provides instructions, guidance and training on nationality matters to Governors and their staff in the territories. Through the United Kingdom Passport Service my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is also responsible currently for the issue of British citizen passports for some of the territories.

Carlile Report

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's response to the Carlile report. [125454]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), on 28 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 199W. The Government response, outlining progress on recommendations made in the Carlile report, is available in the Library.

Contingency Planning

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met *(a)* Cabinet colleagues, *(b)* the Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator and *(c)* the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee to discuss the UK's preparedness to cope with a terrorist attack; and if he will make a statement. [125031]

Mr. Blunkett: The Government keeps all aspects of the security of the UK under constant review and I am in regular contact with various elements of the intelligence community to assess the terrorist threat to the UK.

The threat from terrorist attack remains real as it has done for some time. However the intelligence and law enforcement agencies of the UK are constantly reviewing procedures to be taken in the event of a terrorist attack and the Government has provided significant funding to continue the vital improvements they have been made in this area since the tragic events of September 11th.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training and instructions have been issued to *(a)* ambulance crews, *(b)* paramedics, *(c)* GPs, *(d)* accident and emergency staff, *(e)* fire services and *(f)* police forces about the identification of radioisotopes in the event of the release of a radiological bomb; and if he will make a statement. [125155]

Mr. Blunkett: With funding of £2.7 million from the Department of Health, the Health Protection Agency (HPA) is currently delivering a wide ranging programme of training on CBRN which encompasses responding to the release of radioisotopes from a radiological devise.

The radiological component is being delivered in conjunction with the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) which has significant experience of such training. NRPB are the body responsible for providing formal advice to Government on radiological protection issues and provided a significant input to the guidance to the NHS.

The national health service (NHS) has long-standing plans for responding to incidents involving radioactivity and these have been well exercised. The NHS has practical experience of responding to accidental releases of radioactive material. This experience provides a basic platform for dealing with radiological contamination, however caused. Advice to NHS personnel on responding to incidents, such as radioactivity released from radiological bombs, is given in a detailed annex "Practical guidance on planning for incidents involving radioactivity" (www.doh.gov.uk/epcu/chp9/rad.htm) within the document "Planning for Major Incidents: the NHS Guidance" (1998). This guidance contains advice on the provision of facilities and equipment for monitoring for radioactivity for people who might have been contaminated. The document "Deliberate Release of Biological and Chemical Guidance" (2000) also gives generic advice on dealing with a Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) incident (www.doh.gov.uk/epcu/cbr/intro.htm).

On the Fire Service, the Fire Service has always had procedures and training to deal with radiation incidents. All firefighters receive training as part of their normal development. Enhanced by officers who attend the Hazardous Materials and Environmental Protection course at the Fire Service College, and are mobilised to any radiation incident.

On police force training and instructions, to date a total of approximately 3,800 police officers have been trained with 2,862 of these having been trained at the

Police National CBRN Centre since August 2002. All of the police officers trained by the PNCBRNC (Police National CBRN Centre) have received training regarding a possible radiological incident.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what equipment has been issued to *(a)* ambulance crews, *(b)* paramedics, *(c)* GPs, *(d)* accident and emergency staff, *(e)* fire services and *(f)* police forces for the identification of radioisotopes in the event of the release of a radiological bomb; and if he will make a statement. [125156]

Mr. Blunkett: Initial detection of any chemical or radiological hazard at the scene of an incident normally falls to the fire service—although the police may also contribute and this is well understood amongst the emergency services. In conjunction with the police, the fire service will also decide the extent of the cordon required and provide advice to ambulance and other NHS staff attending. Expert advice is also quickly available from the Health Protection Agency and other agencies.

Fire and Rescue services have detection (survey meters) and monitoring (Dosimeter) equipment to enable them to both detect a source and monitor the doses received by firefighters.

It is not possible to give details publicly of police equipment which is used solely to respond to a CBRN terrorist incident for security reasons.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the optimum treatment time for radioisotope contamination in the event of a radiological bomb. [125157]

Mr. Blunkett: In the event of radioactive contamination following a radiological bomb the immediate danger is still from any injuries sustained. Therefore, the basic principle is that treatment of serious or life-threatening injuries must take priority over radiation monitoring or decontamination.

Health risks from radioactive contamination are less immediate and there is therefore time to assess the level of contamination before decontamination and any further treatment.

Corporate Manslaugher

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the regulatory impact assessment concerning the proposed new offence of corporate manslaughter has been completed; and if he will make a statement. [125049]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* The results of the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) are still being assessed but the preliminaryvindications are that the costs of a change in the lawbwill not be large. As made clear in the RIA, no new burdens will be placed on companies in terms of the standards with which they will be legally required toncomply. That RIA results may need to be refined to reflect any changes to the original proposals.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which industries in the private sector were selected for the regulatory impact assessment for the new offence of corporate manslaughter; on what basis such industries were selected; and if he will make a statement. [125050]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* The Regulatory Impact Assessment was based upon a survey (conducted in September 2002) of different sectors of private industry. These included the construction sector, the mining and quarrying sector, the transport sector, and others. We did not contact companies directly, but through their representative organisations.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is in relation to *(a)* Crown immunity and *(b)* who should conduct prosecution inquiries in relation to the proposed offence of corporate manslaughter; and if he will make a statement. [125051]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 11 July 2003]:* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced on the 20 May that firm proposals for legislation on corporate killing will be published before the end of this year. The position of Crown bodies and the issue of who should investigate and prosecute, will be issues for consideration. No decisions have yet been made.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial support is provided by Government to the Criminal Records Bureau; when the Bureau expects to become self-financing; and what impact he estimates self-financing may have on future fee levels for disclosure certificates. [122485]

Paul Goggins: In 2003–04 the Home Office, Department of Health and Department for Education and Skills are expected to contribute £18.8 million towards the £75 million cost of the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB); the remainder will be met from fee income. Further funding by the three Departments will be provided in 2004–05. The CRB is expected to become self-funding from 2005–06. The fees for Disclosures are reviewed annually. Decisions on any fee increase for future years will be taken in the light of the then best estimates of the costs of the Disclosure service and the level of demand.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the timetable is for taking forward the recommendations of the Independent Review of the Criminal Records Bureau. [122486]

Paul Goggins: Work is progressing on implementing the Independent Review Team's 10 recommendations. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made clear in his written statement on 27 February 2003, *Official Report*, columns 32–36WS, a number of the recommendations are dependent on primary legislation while others are linked to the re-negotiation of the contract with Capita. Amendments to Part 5 of the Police Act 1997, under which the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) operates, have now been incorporated into the Criminal Justice Bill (recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4 and 10). The contract renegotiations with Capita are ongoing and we expect to conclude them by late autumn (recommendations 1 and 7). The CRB is on course to pilot the electronic submission of applications by the

end of the year (recommendation 3) and is currently piloting an electronic database to 'flag' the existence of local police intelligence (recommendation 5). We are considering the results of the consultation on the Review Team's proposal (recommendation 6) that applications for Basic Disclosures should be routed through a registered body. We expect to issue a consultation paper by the end of July on whether applicants for the most sensitive positions should be required to submit their fingerprints with their Disclosure application (recommendation 8). An announcement on establishing the CRB as a separate Agency will be made soon (recommendation 9).

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the revenue gained as a result of the proposed increase to disclosure fees for standard and enhanced disclosures by the Criminal Records Bureau. [122768]

Paul Goggins: The estimated revenue gained as a result of the increase in Criminal Records Bureau disclosure fees for the period 1 July 2003 to 31 March 2004 is £29.5 million. Total revenue from fees in 2003–04 is estimated to be £56.2 million, with the Home Office, Department of Health and Department for Education and Skills contributing the balance, of £18.8 million, towards the £75 million cost of the Bureau.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for redeployment of members of his Department out of London and the South East. [125390]

Fiona Mactaggart: The scope for relocating Government activity is being considered by Sir Michael Lyons. His independent review was announced in the Chancellor's Budget statement on 9 April.

Details of the review, including the consultation launched on 19 June, can be found on Her Majesty's Treasury website at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk. Sir Michael will report his findings on the scope for relocating Departments and other public sector bodies before the end of the year.

DNA Database

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of those recorded on the national DNA database has a criminal conviction. [124972]

Paul Goggins: The proportion of individuals recorded on the National DNA database who have a criminal conviction is 95 per cent.

Drugs

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many class A drug supply offenders there are for every 10,000 residents in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* the west midlands and *(c)* Coventry; [126048]

(2) how many people were convicted of class A drug supply offences for every 10,000 residents in 2002 in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* the west midlands and *(c)* Coventry. [126049]

Caroline Flint: The number of Class A drug offenders is not known. We do have information on the number of offenders brought to justice in England and Wales, though not at constituency level. 630 offenders were brought to justice in the west midlands police force area for Class A drug supply offences in 2000, and 8,409 such offenders in England and Wales in the same period.

Using current population estimates for 2000, 2.41 offenders per 10,000 residents in the west midlands police force area were brought to justice for Class A supply offences in that year. In England and Wales, 1.59 offenders per 10,000 residents were brought to justice.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of defendants sentenced to a drugs treatment and testing order re-offended during the currency of the order in each year since it was introduced. [122121]

Paul Goggins: It is too soon for validated information about re-offending since national roll-out of the order in October 2000. It is currently impossible to differentiate between offences committed prior to the commencement of the order and those committed after the order was made.

A one-year reconviction study of offenders in the pilot areas will be published shortly and I will send the hon. Member a copy as soon as it is available.

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the number of offenders with drug problems who enter treatment. [125108]

Caroline Flint: The Government fully recognises the need to focus the Criminal Justice system towards drug misusing offenders and has set out measures to use the criminal justice system to engage drug-misusing offenders, driving them into treatment and out of crime.

Those measures constitute the Criminal Justice Interventions Programme which aims to ensure that while individual Interventions such as Arrest Referral, Drug Testing, Drug Treatment and Testing Orders, are expanded, there is a step-change in interventions delivering an end-to-end system for drug misusing offenders. These measures will work in parallel with appropriate treatment interventions to establish an integrated care pathway.

Government funding on treatment services for drug misusers will rise from £438 million to £503 million by 2003–04. The National Treatment Agency has several initiatives underway to increase the capacity of the treatment sector and reduce waiting times, and the updated Drug Strategy is currently on track to double capacity, by 2008, with 200,000 problem drug users to be treated each year.

The Updated Drug Strategy, which provides for a wider programme of targeted interventions, includes making the Drug Treatment and Testing Order available to as many drug misusing offenders as possible within existing capacity levels and taking into account predicted growth within the treatment and Criminal Justice sectors.

Holloway Prison

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many girls under 18 were held in custody in Holloway Prison in each of the last 12 months, broken down by age. [125662]

Paul Goggins: The number of girls aged under 18 who were held in custody in Holloway Prison in each of the last 12 months, broken down by age, is given in the table.

	16	*17*
June 2002	3	10
July 2002	2	9
August 2002	1	10
September 2002	0	8
October 2002	0	12
November 2002	0	12
December 2002	1	10
January 2003	2	8
February 2003	0	6
March 2003	0	6
April 2003	0	7
May 2003	0	11

IT Expenditure

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much he spent on IT *(a)* maintenance, *(b)* licences, *(c)* software and *(d)* hardware in the last financial year. [125716]

Fiona Mactaggart: The cost to the Home Department for the above in 2002–03 were:

IT Hardware: £7,117,123.35

IT Software: £1,617,224.63

Maintenance: £120,179,217.54

The figures include the Forensic Science Service (FSS) but do not include the Prison Service or Passport Agency who were unable to provide a breakdown of IT expenditure without disproportionate cost to the Department.

The software figures include costs for software licences. The Maintenance figures cover a range of expenditure, namely:

Bulk Printing; Business Projects; Data Entry Services; IT Other Running Costs; IT Services Sema; Siemens Costs; Sirius Costs; Small Business Projects; Standard Workstation Charges; VAT charges.

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what major IT projects with a value in excess of £10,000 he authorised expenditure on in each of the last three financial years. [125725]

Fiona Mactaggart: Information for the Central Home Office projects in relation to IS/IT and Business Change can be found in the table which excludes the provision of desktop services. The table shows information on relevant IT projects for the Passport Agency.

Project title	*Department*	*Financial year*
Admin IT	Passport Agency	2002–03
Passport Cards	Passport Agency	2020–03
EPA-2	Passport Agency	2002–03
Lost Stolen and Recovered	Passport Agency	2002–03
FRS	Passport Agency	2002–03
FCO Data Exchange Omnibase	Passport Agency	2002–03

Individual values have not been given to protect commercial confidentiality.

Naturalisation Applications

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many naturalisation applications his Department is dealing with. [123972]

Beverley Hughes: As at 31 March 2003, 74,841 applications for all types of British nationality were under consideration by the Nationality Group in Liverpool.

Operation Corolla

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what intelligence Operation Corolla of 13 November 2002 in Gwent, Dyfed-Powys and Gloucestershire was based. [125558]

Caroline Flint: The Welsh Police Forces have a good relationship with the public they serve and this operation came about as a result of community intelligence. Information was received from community members of increased drug activity by a group of criminals from outside of the Newport area—leading to this successful investigation. Early identification of organised crime groups, with the immediate response of disruption tactics, has proved successful and the Force will continue with this approach.

Prisons

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to build more prisons; what the cost of the construction programme is; and if he will make a statement. [124595]

Paul Goggins: Two prisons are being built at Ashford, Middlesex and Peterborough. The construction costs of the two prisons are £111.5 million but, as the prisons are being procured under the Private Finance Initiative, no costs will be incurred until the prisons open, scheduled for June 2004 and March 2005 respectively.

Outline planning permission, subject to a legal agreement to give effect to certain planning conditions, has been obtained for two more prisons on land adjacent to Ashworth Special Hospital, Merseyside and adjacent to Her Majesty's Prison Belmarsh in south-east London.

In addition, the Government have provided funds to increase capacity by 3,220 additional prison places at existing prisons, such as an extension to Birmingham prison. The total construction costs for these places will be £390 million.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the construction of new prisons at Ashford and Peterborough was ordered. [125216]

Paul Goggins: The contracts for new prisons at Ashford, Middlesex and at Peterborough were signed on 20 December 2002 and 14 February 2003 respectively. Contract signature authorised the contractor to commence construction which is now in progress at both sites.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average cost was in 2002–03 of imprisoning an offender for one year; and if he will make a statement. [124596]

Paul Goggins: The average cost per prisoner in 2002–03 was £36,268.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the provision of education courses in prisons; [124415]

(2) what plans he has to contract out education courses in prisons. [124416]

Paul Goggins: Effective learning and skills programmes are key to the Government's rehabilitation agenda. It is important that provision available to prisoners reaches the same standards as we expect of providers in the community. Prisoners are working towards nationally recognised qualifications that are relevant to the needs of the labour market—from basic communication skills through to higher level vocational qualifications. We are looking to education and training provision in prisons to meet the national standards expected by Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate.

The Prison Service is in the process of appointing new Heads of Learning and Skills across the prison estate who will help to develop and plan provision and drive up standards. The substantial rise in funding for education and training for prisoners over the next three years will enable us to increase the number and range of courses available. We have given early priority to expanding provision in establishments holding female prisoners and young offenders aged 18–21.

Investment by the Youth Justice Board in learning and skills for the juvenile estate will provide high quality, individualised programmes for all learners together with support appropriate to young people with a diverse range of needs.

Education courses in prisons are contracted out to a number of further education colleges and local authorities as well as one private provider. The Prison Service is working with the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit, which has policy responsibility for prison education, to let new contracts for learning and skills services from September 2004.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the most overcrowded prison is; what the ratio of cells to prisoners is in that prison; and if he will make a statement. [124594]

Paul Goggins: The Prison Service defines overcrowding as when the number of prisoners held at the prison exceeds its uncrowded capacity, known as in use certified normal accommodation (CNA). Shrewsbury prison was the most overcrowded prison in England and Wales as at June 2003.

At Shrewsbury prison, the in use CNA as at June 2003 was 183 but the number of prisoners held on 27 June 2003 was 344.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the ratio of staff to prisoners was in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [124601]

Paul Goggins: The ratio of Prison Service staff to prisoners for each year since 1990 is shown in the following table:

	Ratio
1990	1:1.40
1991	1:1.41
1992	1:1.31
1993	1:1.17
1994	1:1.25
1995	1:1.26
1996	1:1.33
1997	1:1.45
1998	1:1.49
1999	1:1.40
2000	1:1.37
2001	1:1.36
2002	1:1.43
2003	1:1.44

Prison Service recruitment has increased significantly in recent years, particularly among operational grades, in response to the rise in the prison population. In total, 6,217 new staff joined the Service during 2002–03 compared to 4,337 in the previous 12 months.

During 2002–03, 2,096 new prison officers completed initial entry-level training compared to an average of 978 new officers in each of the previous four years. This is expected to increase to 2,200 new officers during the current financial year.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to tackle the number of suicides in prisons. [124414]

Paul Goggins: All suicides are tragic events affecting families and staff deeply, and reducing prisoner self-inflicted deaths and managing self-harm remains a key priority for Ministers and the Prison Service. The general prison population contains a large number of prisoners with a combination of psychiatric disorders, alcohol and drug dependency, family background and relationship problems, histories of self-harm and previous abuse, all of which raise their risk of suicide. Good care and support from staff saves many lives but such instances go largely unreported. One hundred and forty-one prisoners were resuscitated following self-harm incidents in 2002 and 37 in the first five months of this year.

The Prison Service is in the final year of a three-year strategy to develop policies and practices to reduce prisoner suicide and manage self-harm in prisons. Over the next few months the outcome of this will be reviewed taking into account pilot project evaluations and emerging research findings. The next steps will be agreed in consultation with partner agencies and organisations.

As part of this close partnership with other agencies such as the Youth Justice Board and outside organisations such as Samaritans, there has been a particular focus on improvements at six pilot sites in areas such as improved reception, first night and induction areas and mental health in-reach support. The Prison Service is running a series of projects to develop improved suicide prevention and self-harm management policies, concentrating on pre-reception, reception and induction arrangements; inter-agency information exchange; prisoner care; detoxification; prisoner peer support, and learning from investigations into deaths in custody.

Additionally, Samaritans are recruiting and training more prisoner peer supporters (known as Listeners) in high-risk establishments. One thousand one hundred and forty new Listeners were recruited between 1 October 2001 and 31 December 2002 with further recruitment and training continuing. Listeners are selected, trained and supported by Samaritans to offer confidential support to their fellow prisoners who may be at risk of suicide, otherwise in crisis, or simply in need of someone to talk to. The scheme's objectives are to assist in preventing suicide, reducing self-harm and to help alleviate the feelings of those in distress.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men over 65 and *(b)* women over 60 are held in prisons in England and Wales. [125501]

Paul Goggins: On 31 May 2003, there were 608 men over the age of 65 and 22 women over the age of 60 in prisons in England and Wales.

Royal Security

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions on royal security at Buckingham Palace he has held with Palace authorities. [125987]

Mr. Blunkett: The protective security measures implemented at Royal sites are constantly under review and, as such, the Home Office is in regular contact with Palace authorities and the police over these measures. The hon. Member will also be aware of the review established following the incident at Windsor Castle last month. However, as the hon. Member will appreciate, it would not be appropriate for me to comment upon the details of these measures on the grounds of security.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many planning applications have been made to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department. [124812]

Fiona Mactaggart: No central records are kept on the number of planning applications to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department. However, since August 2001 when the current planning regulations on mobile telecommunications masts came into force there have been five applications to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Prison Service.

Vignettes Programme

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the reason was for the delay in the vignettes programme announcement; and if he will make a statement. [125528]

Beverley Hughes: Contract negotiations have proved to be more complex than originally foreseen. An announcement of the outcome will be made shortly.

Work Permits

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many out of country work permits have been granted in the first six months of 2003; and what *(a)* the primary occupations were for which such permits were issued and *(b)* the country of origin of recipients; [123779]

(2) how many in-country work permits have been granted in the first six months of 2003; and what *(a)* the occupations were for which such permits were issued and *(b)* the country of origin of recipients. [123780]

Beverley Hughes: Figures for the second quarter will not be available until August 2003.

Figures for the primary occupations for which most in-country and out-of-country work permit applications have been issued in the first three months of 2003, include the top five nationalities for each occupation.

The total number of out-of-country work permits issued in the first three months of 2003 is 20,769.

A copy of the tables will be placed in the Library.

Young Offenders

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young offenders were placed on Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programmes, broken down by region, 2002–03. [124556]

Paul Goggins: The number of young offenders placed on the scheme by region between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2003 is set out in the table.

Regions	*Number of young offenders placed on ISSP[1] between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2003*
East Midlands	180
East of England	127
London	533
North East	369
North West	724
South East	102
South West	58
West Midlands	411
Yorkshire and the Humber	452
Wales	265

[1] Intensive Supervision and Surveillance.

SCOTLAND

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many new entrants to the Civil Service

were employed in his Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 or over. [119819]

Mrs. McGuire: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 24 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 658W.

Dover House

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future of Dover House. [120174]

Mrs. McGuire *[holding answer 19 June 2003]:* Dover House is the headquarters of the Scotland Office and the Office of the Advocate-General, which are now part of the Department for Constitutional Affairs.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what revised guidelines have been issued in respect of Scottish Executive use of Dover House. [121151]

Mrs. McGuire: None. The Scottish Executive continues to occupy accommodation in Dover House on the basis of an agreement with the Scotland Office.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what targets his Department has for improving energy efficiency; and how he intends to achieve these targets. [116647]

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what targets he has for improving departmental energy efficiency; and how he intends to achieve these targets. [119643]

Mrs. McGuire: I refer the hon. Members to the answer given by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Defra, on 9 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 581W.

European Constitution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European constitution. [124856]

Mrs. McGuire: As part of the normal Whitehall process, officials and I have had regular correspondence with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss all aspects of the Convention, including legislative competences. In line with Exemptions 1 and 2 of the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information", it is not the normal practice of Governments to disclose details about internal discussions, or information whose disclosure would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs.

Proceeds of Crime

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total value of assets and illegal gains confiscated from criminals is in Scotland since the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 came into effect. [126509]

Mrs. McGuire: The criminal confiscation provisions in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 came into effect on 24 March 2003. Following from transitional arrangements, cases already being processed have been dealt with under the Proceeds of Crime (Scotland) Act 1995.

In the period from 24 March to 30 June 2003, confiscation orders totalling £435,864 were imposed by the courts in Scotland under the 1995 Act. In respect of cases under investigation using the new powers, £793,000 is now under restraint, in anticipation of confiscation orders being made following conviction in a criminal court.

Scotland Office

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Ministers there were in the Scottish Office and Scotland Office in each year since 1996. [120986]

Mrs. McGuire: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office, on 24 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 661W.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Scotland Office is a Department of State. [121153]

Mrs. McGuire: No. The Scotland Office is a distinct entity within the Department for Constitutional Affairs.

Special Advisers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the salary bill was for special advisers in her Department in 2002–03; and what it is expected to be in 2003–04. [108506]

Mrs. McGuire: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office, on 28 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 45W.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff are employed by his Department. [106288]

Mrs. McGuire: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 3 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 780W.

Sustainable Development

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when his departmental strategy for sustainable development will be published; and what steps are being taken to take forward the actions outlined. [119644]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office does not intend to publish a strategy for sustainable development.

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what remit relating to sustainable development is *(a)* required and *(b)* undertaken by his Department's (i) executive agencies, (ii) advisory non-departmental bodies, (iii) executive non-departmental bodies, (iv) tribunals, (v) public corporations and (vi) other bodies. [119645]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office sponsors only one body, the Boundary Commission for Scotland, which has no remit relating to sustainable development.

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment is made *(a)* of the environmental impact and *(b)* against sustainable development criteria of the (i) bids made for the different grants awarded by her Department and (ii) bids made for any contracts awarded by his Department; who makes such an assessment; and whether these assessments are published. [119646]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office has no provision for awarding grants. Contracts awarded by the Scotland Office are devised in accordance with Government guidelines.

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which United Kingdom commitments arising from the World Summit on Sustainable Development *(a)* have been incorporated into the Department's existing delivery plan for Service Delivery Agreements and *(b)* will be incorporated in its delivery plan for Service Delivery Agreements in advance of the 2004 Spending Review. [113882]

Mrs. McGuire: As stated in the Scotland Office Departmental Report 2003 (Cm 5927), it was decided in the 2002 Spending Review that the Scotland Office would no longer require a formal Service Delivery Agreement. The Scotland Office takes account of the United Kingdom's commitments arising from the World Summit on sustainable development.

Timber

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether his Department's procurement policy covers timber used on and in the construction of departmental building projects; and if he will make a statement. [119647]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office has not recently commissioned any major building project involving the use of timber. Its purchasing policy follows Government guidelines and takes full account of environmental considerations.

TRANSPORT

Biofuels

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 10 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 928W, on biofuels, when he will be consulting stakeholders on *(a)* indicative targets for the use of biofuels and *(b)* the most appropriate ways of meeting them. [126864]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government intend to consult on the level of indicative targets for both 2005 and 2010 and on the most appropriate ways of meeting them during the first half of next year.

Buses

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the local institutions which have *(a)* made bids, *(b)* received funding and *(c)* have bids under consideration under the Urban Bus Challenge. [126333]

Mr. McNulty: The Rural and Urban Bus Challenge schemes are annual competitions which have been held since 1998 and 2001 respectively. Local transport authorities are those bodies eligible to make bids. Typically around 50 authorities submit bids to each competition.

In total over 300 awards have been made under the schemes. Lists of the authorities and projects that have been awarded funding are available in the Libraries of the House.

No bids are currently under consideration. The closing dates for receipt of bids to this year's competitions are 26 September (Urban Bus Challenge) and 31 October (Rural Bus Challenge).

Cycling

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with London borough authorities to encourage the creation of cycle lanes within their boroughs; and if he will make a statement. [125503]

Mr. McNulty: None. The promotion of cycling in London is a matter for the Mayor of London and Transport for London.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the cost was to his Department for *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers, *(b)* taxis, *(c)* train travel, *(d)* the use of helicopters, *(e)* airline tickets and *(f)* chartered aeroplanes in each year since 1997. [123084]

Mr. McNulty: The cost of ministerial cars and drivers for the Department will be addressed in a letter from Mr. Nick Matheson, the Chief Executive of the Government Car and Despatch Agency to the hon. Member.

The Department for Transport came into existence on 29 May 2002 following machinery of Government changes. All travel by officials in the Department for Transport is undertaken in accordance with the rules contained in the departmental staff handbook. Ministerial travel is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Full detailed information for parts *(b)*, *(c)*, *(d)* and *(e)* could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for redeployment of members of his Department out of London and the south-east. [125389]

Mr. McNulty: The scope for relocating Government activity is being considered by Sir Michael Lyons. His independent review was announced in the Chancellor's Budget Statement on the 9 April.

Details of the review, including the consultation launched on 19 June, can be found on the HM Treasury website at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk. Sir Michael will report his findings on the scope for relocating Departments and other public sector bodies before the end of the year.

The Department was formed in May 2002. Some 75 per cent. of staff from the central Department and executive agencies are located away from London and the south-east. The most recent relocation activity has involved the Highways Agency that is in the process of relocating some 300 posts away from London to their regional office network by October 2003.

East London Line

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress on the East London Line Extensions. [126437]

Dr. Howells: We have told the SRA that we agree that they should take the East London Line Extensions project forward, on the basis that their business case confirms that the project offers value for money and that they have the resources to do so. The SRA are developing proposals for the project to be implemented by way of a privately financed special purpose vehicle. Following the conclusion of legal proceedings concerning the Bishopsgate Goodsyard, preparatory site clearance and demolition work is now under way.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the Department's policies have been screened for their environmental impact since June 2001; how many environmental appraisals have been conducted, and on what policy issues; and what information has been published about these screenings and appraisals. [124713]

Mr. McNulty: All of the policies identified in the Department's 10-Year Plan for Transport, published in 2000, have been appraised using an approach that takes account of sustainable development objectives, and builds on our new approach to appraisal which takes full account of environmental impacts. An appraisal summary table is included in the background analysis to the plan. A similar approach will be adopted for the review of the 10-year plan.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the EU directives implemented by the Department since 8 June 2001. [126597]

Mr. Jamieson: Since 8 June 2001, the Department has implemented 29 Directives. These are listed as follows:

2002/7—Amending 96/53/EC and laying down for certain road vehicles circulating within the Community the maximum authorised dimensions in national and international traffic and the maximum authorised weights in international traffic

2001/85—Relating to special provisions for vehicles used for the carriage of passengers comprising more than eight seats in addition to the driver's seat, and amending Directives 70/156/EEC and 97/27/EC.

2001/105—Amending Directive 94/57/EC on common rules and standards for ship inspection and survey organisations and for the relevant activities of maritime administrations.

2002/41—Commission Directive adapting to technical progress 95/1/EC on the maximum design speed, maximum torque and maximum net engine power of two or three wheel motor vehicles.

2002/80—Adapting to technical progress Council Directive 70/220/EEC relating to measures to be taken against air pollution by emissions from motor vehicles.

2002/24—Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council relating to the type approval of two or three wheeled motor vehicles and their trailers, amending Directive 70/156/EEC and repealing Directive 78/548/EEC.

2002/51—Reduction of the level of pollutant emissions from two and three wheeled motor vehicles and amending Directive 97/54/EC.

2002/75—Amending Directive 96/98/EC on marine equipment.

2001/11—Relating to roadworthiness tests for vehicles and their trailers.

2002/35—Setting up a harmonised safety regime for fishing vessels of 24 meters in length or over.

2002/78—Adapting to technical progress Directive 71/320/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the member states relating to the braking devices of certain categories of motor vehicles and their trailers.

2000/59—Port reception facilities for ship generated waste and cargo residues.

2001/10—Approximation of the laws of the member states on measures to be taken against air pollution by emissions from motor vehicles.

2002/25—Amending 98/18/EC on safety rules and standards for passenger ships.

2001/43—Amending 92/23/EEC relating to tyres for motor vehicles and their trailers and their fitting.

2001/116—Adapting to technical progress 70/156/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the member states relating to type-approval of motor vehicles and their trailers.

2001/92—Adapting to technical progress 92/22/EEC on safety glazing and glazing materials on motor vehicles and their trailers and 70/156/EC relating to the type approval of motor vehicles and their trailers.

2001/63—Adapting to technical progress 97/68/EC on the approximation of the laws of the member states relating to measures against the emission of gaseous and particulate pollutants from internal combustion engines to be installed in non-road mobile machinery.

1999/95—Concerning the enforcement of provisions in respect of seafarers hours of work on board ships calling at Community ports.

2000/30—Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on technical roadside inspection of the roadworthiness of commercial vehicles circulating in the Community.

2001/09—Adapting to technical progress 96/96/EC on the approximation of the laws of member states relating to roadworthiness tests for motor vehicles and their trailers.

2001/01—Amending Directive 70/220/EEC concerning measures to be taken against air pollution by emissions from vehicles.

2000/73—Adapting to technical progress Directive 93/92/EEC on the installation of lighting and light signalling devices on two and three wheeled motor vehicles.

2000/74—Adapting to technical progress Directive 93/29/EEC concerning the identification of controls, tell-tales and indicators on two and three wheeled motor vehicles.

2001/26—Amending Directive 95/50/EC on uniform procedures for checks on the transport of dangerous goods by road.

2001/27—Relating to measures to be taken against the emission of gaseous and particulate pollutants from compression-ignition engines for use in vehicles, and the emission of gaseous pollutants from positive-ignition engines fuelled with natural gas or liquefied petroleum gas for use in vehicles.

2001/31—Adapting to technical progress Directive 70/387/EEC relating to the doors of motor vehicles and their trailers.

1999/94—Relating to the availability of consumer information on fuel economy and CO_2 emissions in respect of the marketing of new passenger cars.

1999/97—Amending 95/21/EC concerning the enforcement, in respect of shipping using community ports and sailing in the waters under the jurisdiction of the member states, of international standards for ship safety, pollution prevention and shipboard living and working conditions.

European Constitution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with *(a)* colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and *(b)* counterparts in the European Union about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European constitution. [124778]

Mr. Jamieson: As part of the normal Whitehall process, my Department has had regular correspondence with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss all aspects of the Convention, including legislative competences. We have also had regular contact with member and accession states to discuss issues arising in the Convention. In line with exemptions 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the normal practice of Governments to disclose details about internal discussions, or information whose disclosure would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs.

Helicopter Safety

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the manufacturers provided a report on the on-deck pitch/heave and roll certification of a Super Puma helicopter which rolled over on the West Navion on 10 November 2001; what plans he has to publish the report; and what proposals he has to amend helideck movement criteria. [126524]

Mr. McNulty: The manufacturers of the Super Puma have not yet provided the UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) with any report on the on-deck pitch/heave and roll limits for the super puma helicopter. I am also still awaiting publication of the Air Accident Investigation Branch (AAIB) report into the West Navion Super Puma accident which occurred on 10 November 2001. We are however aware that this specific accident resulted from a ship control malfunction that caused a rapid and unanticipated change to the ship's position and heading.

Extensive research by the CAA into operations to moving decks has been undertaken and remains on-going. It is expected that this research will provide the basis for any proposal for changes to helideck movement criteria. There are no plans to require amendment to the current criteria until the research is completed.

Hybrid Vehicles

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to expand the scheme of assistance to purchasers of electric-petrol hybrid vehicles to include those private and business motorists leasing vehicles through direct arrangements with the manufacturers. [126919]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government recognise that hybrid vehicles can provide useful environmental benefits over conventionally powered vehicles and that hybrid technology may provide a bridge between internal combustion engines and fuel cells.

The Government support the take-up of hybrid vehicles with PowerShift purchase grants of £1,000. All leasing companies, including leasing companies associated with manufacturers, are eligible for PowerShift grants, which reduce the cost of the vehicle owned by the leasing company and put the leasing company in a position to provide lower priced vehicle leasing to motorists.

Information Technology

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what major IT projects with a value in excess of £10,000 he authorised expenditure on in each of the last three financial years. [125721]

Mr. McNulty: The Department was formed on 29 May 2002. The information is as follows:

Central Department (DfT)

Electronic Service Delivery of Abnormal Loads
DfT Electronic Systems for Highways
Next Generation Website
Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee E-Community
Vax Migration Project Phases 2a-2b
DfT/ODPM Intranet Strategic IT Enhancement
Windows XP Migration
Personnel Improving Services and Modernisation
BS7799
Data Communications Service
ETHOS End-to-End Performance Monitoring
GSI Upgrade
PC Replacement
Remote Access Upgrade
Single Sign On Implementation

DSA

DSA Intranet

DVLA

Electronic Vehicle Re-Licensing
Electronic Point of Sale Replacement
Abandoned Vehicles—Links to Local Authorities
e-Procurement

Highways Agency

Human Resources Management Information System

EDRM

Marine and Coastguard Agency

EDRM

Equipment Refresh

Forms

Web Enhancement

The word "authorised" has been interpreted to mean projects with an approved business case.

Note:

In some areas of the Department the thresholds for major IT projects are significantly higher than £10,000. Projects below this threshold will have been locally funded and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by his Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if he will make a statement. [126195]

Mr. McNulty: Since 1997, the Department for Transport has signed nine outsourced IT contracts, with a total value of £637 million. These contracts were let with:

Amey IT Services

Capita Business Services Ltd.

Compaq (2)

EDS Ltd.

IBM/Fujitsu

LogicaCMG

SchlumbergerSema

Siemens Business Services

Two of these contracts have been renegotiated; seven are still in place.

London Underground

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 270W, on underground (masks), how many drivers on the London Underground have asthma; what research has been undertaken on the effect of tunnel dust on those drivers who suffer from asthma; and if he will make a statement. [125376]

Mr. McNulty: This is an operational matter for London Underground.

Marine Environment

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what environmental safeguards have been put in place to protect the marine environment from damage due to incidents involving uncrewed ships being transported from the United States to the UK to be broken up; what notification he has received of proposals to bring ships to the UK for this purpose; and what discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive on this issue. [125803]

Mr. Jamieson: The UK has had no notification of this proposal but is aware of articles in the press. Officials in the Department for Transport and the Scottish Executive have considered the implications but understand, however, that commercial arrangements for this towage have yet to be confirmed.

If such proposals mature there are conditions that the UK will insist upon to mitigate risks of operations. The passage of such ships under tow would be the object of a risk assessment, with particular regard to the towing vessel suitability and capacity, the type of towage gear and the dimensions and nature of the object to be towed.

In that event the MCA would insist that international requirements were adhered to. They would include interim conditional load line certification and towage certification, linked to classification society and insurance requirements. All would be a clear requirement on the operator before the tow was allowed into the UK Pollution Control Zone (UKPCZ).

Such an assessment would include likely risk of significant pollution. Ships or tows with significant risk would not be allowed in a UKPCZ and the UK has powers to restrict or ban such movements, through intervention.

Ministerial Meetings

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in the devolved administrations about concessionary travel schemes; [126517]

(2) how often he met his counterparts in the devolved administrations in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [126519]

Mr. McNulty: Ministers meet their counterparts from time to time to discuss a range of issues.

Ministerial Travel

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions *(a)* he and *(b)* each of his ministerial colleagues has used (i) the railways and (ii) a ministerial car in association with official ministerial duties since their appointment. [126819]

Mr. McNulty: Arrangements for official travel are made in line with guidance set out in Chapter 7 of the Ministerial Code and the accompanying guidance document travel by Ministers, using the most efficient and cost-effective mode of transport, and bearing in mind security considerations.

An initial check of the diaries show that Ministers have used (i) the railways 34 times and (ii) ministerial cars 13 times in association with ministerial duties outside London in the period since being appointed.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when *(a)* he and *(b)* each of his ministerial colleagues next plan to use the railways in association with official ministerial duties. [126820]

Mr. McNulty: Ministers travel by rail on a regular basis in the course of their official duties and will continue to do so.

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many planning applications have been made to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department. [124807]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the cost was to his Department of mobile phones supplied to Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123143]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Motorway Accidents

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 9 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 805W, on motorway accidents, how many of these accidents resulted in the death of a driver or passenger. [126931]

Mr. Jamieson: The numbers of accidents on UK motorways during the hours of darkness which resulted in the death of a driver or passenger in each year since 1997 are shown as follows:

	Number
1997	69
1998	69
1999	76
2000	64
2001	71
2002	72

Network Rail

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of *(a)* the revenues and *(b)* the losses of Network Rail stem from the least used 10 per cent. of the railway network. [125763]

Dr. Howells: The revenues and costs of Network Rail are computed on a network-wide basis under a "single till" mechanism. However, as required by the rail regulator, Network Rail's business plan sets out elements of projected expenditure by route. Furthermore, as part of his current interim review of access charges the regulator has requested from Network Rail certain information on a disaggregated basis, with a view to developing greater local accountability and efficient allocation of resources.

Night Flights

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment has been made by the Department of the economic cost of removing the ban on night flights at Heathrow airport, in terms of the effect on property values on the flight path; what conclusions have been drawn; and if he will make a statement; [125820]

(2) what estimate the Department has made of the economic cost each year of continuing the ban on night flights at Heathrow imposed in 2001 in terms of its impact on the airline industry. [125821]

Mr. McNulty: There is no ban on night flights at Heathrow but, since 1962, various restrictions have been imposed on night flying, in recognition of the disturbance to some people from aircraft noise at night. The restrictions are reviewed from time to time. Details of the present restrictions are given in the consultation paper "Night Flying Restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted" which sets out our proposal to extend those restrictions until October 2005. The consultation closed on 11 July.

Overseas Trips

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what overseas trips were made by *(a)* himself, *(b)* his ministerial team and *(c)* departmental staff in each month since 1 October 2002, specifying in each case (i) the participating Ministers, (ii) the destination of the trip, (iii) the purpose of the trip and (iv) the cost of the trip. [117529]

Mr. McNulty: The detailed information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

All travel booked by civil servants is in accordance with the Civil Service Management Code.

The Government publishes an annual report of ministerial travel overseas. All travel is conducted in line with the requirements of the ministerial code.

US Warships (Disposal)

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the environmental impact of towing former US naval ships through the Pentland Firth. [125688]

Mr. Jamieson: No application has been received to enter the UK Pollution Control Zone which includes the Pentland Firth. UK agreement to a "passage plan" for the proposed tow is required in advance, and such agreement would depend on satisfactory conclusions following a risk assessment, including that of impact on the local environment.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is on proposals to tow former US naval ships through the Pentland Firth en route to Teesside. [125689]

Mr. Jamieson: Proposals for such towage require prior UK agreement to enter the UK Pollution Control Zone.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the UK Administration will exercise its power to prevent the towing of former US naval ships thought to contain toxic chemicals through the Pentland Firth under article 19(2)(h) of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. [125690]

Mr. Jamieson: Article 19(2)(h) of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), refers to acts of "wilful and serious pollution" contrary to UNCLOS. It does not limit proposals for commercial towage, for which separate prior UK agreement is required to enter the UK Pollution Control Zone.

Property Prices (Heathrow Flight Path)

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will conduct a review into the economic impact of Heathrow Airport on property prices for residential houses on the flight path; and if he will make a statement. [125824]

Mr. McNulty: House prices around Heathrow vary and are affected by many factors, as elsewhere. Both the economic benefits of the airport and the environmental disbenefits will affect property prices in a wider area than under the flight paths. There is already extensive worldwide literature on the effect of aircraft noise on house prices although the literature largely concerns day time noise and it is difficult to isolate aircraft noise (or any other single factor) as a discrete influence on house prices.

Ragwort

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contractual arrangements there are for the clearing of ragwort from highway land along *(a)* the A21, *(b)* the A259 and *(c)* other trunk roads in the Bexhill and Battle constituency; and what the cost has been in (i) the last financial year and (ii) this financial year to date. [126957]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Richard Bennett to Mr. Gregory Barker, dated 17 July 2003:

I have been asked by David Jamieson to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the clearance of ragwort along the A21, the A259 and other trunk roads in your constituency.

The clearance of ragwort on the trunk road network is carried out by the Highways Agency's Managing Agent Contractor as pan of their routine maintenance responsibilities. They carry out daily routine inspections of the network 10 identify general defects on the network including the presence of ragwort. Areas affected by ragwort are sprayed using herbicide during the main growing season and where appropriate cutting or weeding by hand of affected areas is also carried out, usually three times a year. Priority is given to the control of ragwort on highway land which is adjacent to or near agricultural or grazing land.

The only trunk roads in the Bexhill and Battle areas are the A21 and A259. All other roads in the area are local roads for which East Sussex County Council is responsible as the local highway authority. The removal of ragwort alongside these roads is a matter for the local highway authority to consider.

Ragwort is a growing problem on the truck road network and we have recently issued a press release which sets out how we intend to combat the problem. I enclose a copy of the press release for your information. You will see from the press release we spend in the region of one million annually to control ragwort.

The managing agent for this area changed on lst June and we have not been able to identify the cost of clearing ragwort on the specific routes you identify. However, expenditure so far this year for the area covered by the contractor (Kent, Surrey, West and East Sussex) is estimated at around £30,000.

I hope this is helpful.

News release

Pretty But Poisonous: Highways Agency Tackles Ragwort

Ragwort's bright yellow flowers are a colourful sight on roadside verges, but the plant has a more sinister side.

Livestock in Britain are at risk of poisoning from common ragwort, so the Highways Agency is working to reduce ragwort growth on the verges of England's motorways and major trunk roads and to prevent the plant from spreading its seed.

Ragwort grows through two distinct stages—the rosette stage from germination to the end of May and the stem-flower stage from June onwards. The rosette stage is the early stage of growth where the ragwort is less noticeable but still poisonous with a dense rosette of leaves close to the ground.

The Highways Agency is using a two-step attack to deal with both stages of growth. The rosettes are being sprayed with an herbicide during May and June, and later, contractors will return to hand pull the older, more mature plants to prevent their seeds being dispersed.

The Highways Agency's environmental policy advisor Tony Sangwine said:

"Ragwort is a difficult plant to combat as it is almost impossible to eradicate, at best it can be controlled. The seeds are very robust and can lie dormant in the soil for up to 20 years and so Ragwort grows unexpectedly in many different places. They can be carried for miles in the wind, and so as part of our work to control the problem, we encourage landowners to remove Ragwort from their land to try and prevent reinvasion.

The Highways Agency takes this perennial problem very seriously as Common Ragwort can pose a serious threat to equines and livestock, and there is no specific treatment once an animal shows symptoms of poisoning."

The Highways Agency spends in the region of £1 million each year to help control the spread of Ragwort along the 5,841 miles of trunk roads and motorways it operates in England, and supports the British Horse Society's (BHS) annual 'Ragwort Action Week' campaign.

Notes to Editors

1. The Highways Agency is an Executive Agency of the Department for Transport, which manages, maintains and improves the network of trunk roads and motorways in England on behalf of the Secretary of State. It works closely with other transport operators and with local authorities to integrate the trunk road network with the rest of England's roads and other forms of transport. More information is available at www.highways.gov.uk

2. Sections of the following route verges will be timetabled for treatment: A27, A249, M20, M23

3. Common ragwort (Senecio jacobaea L.) is one of the five injurious weeds specified in the Weeds Act 1959. Landowners have a duty of care to prevent it spreading.

4. Ragwort is normally a biennial (rosette—spring 1st year; flowering—July/August 2nd year). The rosette stage is the early stage of growth where the ragwort is at its most poisonous and has a dense rosette of leaves close to the ground. In the stem-flower stage, the plant grows between 30cm and 100cm high with clustered bright yellow flowers.

5. Each plant can produce up to 150,000 seeds with a 70% germination rate. Ragworts seeds can be domant in the soil for up to 20 years.

6. Equines and bovines are more susceptible to ragwort poisoning than other livestock. Little can be done for the animal once the symptoms appear. Young animals are more susceptible than mature animals.

7. Ragwort acts as a cumulative poison, eventually destroying the liver. A small intake of ragwort over a long period can be just as damaging as a large intake on a single occasion.

Issued by Highways Agency's South East Press and PR Office.

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Rail Freight

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 1 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 190W, on freight grants, how much the Track Access Grants with a Scottish element awarded by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority were at (i) current prices and (ii) outturn prices for each year since 1996. [125660]

Mr. McNulty: The value of Track Access Grants (TAGs) with a Scottish element awarded by either the Department or the Strategic Rail Authority and their value at 2002–03 prices is listed in the table.

£

	Value of	
	TAGs	*TAGs at 2002–03*
1996–97	355,000	415,730
1997–98	386,954	440,760
1998–99	1,177,560	1,302,639
1999–2000	579,708	626,496
2000–01	—	—
2001–02	1,722,240	1,775,798
2002–03	2,466,176	2,466,176

Rail Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what role signallers play in minimising delays to fast long distance trains. [126832]

Dr. Howells: Network Rail advises that its signallers are responsible for regulating all trains regardless of type, speed or destination to minimise delays where possible.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures will be put in place to prevent train operating companies adopting train crew relief strategies which will stand trains at strategic points along the railway. [126833]

Dr. Howells: This is an operational matter for the train operating companies, having regard to their contractual commitments such as the maximum journey time for services specified in their passenger service requirement, the "rules of the plan" which are agreed with Network Rail and which specify station dwell times, and safety rules.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the European rail traffic management system level 2 will be installed on the UK high speed lines; and for what reasons ERTMS level 1 could not be installed on UK high speed lines with a view to future migration to level 2. [126834]

Dr. Howells: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has identified the Cambrian coast as an ERTMS Level 2 test site. Further work is required before a robust timetable for fitting to high- speed lines can be developed.

The SRA advises that implementation of ERTMS Level 1, followed by subsequent migration to Level 2, would reduce network capacity and track worker safety as a result of increased trackside infrastructure and the costs would far outweigh the benefits. The industry recommendation therefore was to focus development and implementation on ERTMS Level 2. This was supported by the work of the Health and Safety Executive that led to the Health and Safety Commission's recommendation which the Secretary of State accepted in February 2003.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how the introduction of the train protection and warning system has affected line capacity in congested areas of the network. [126835]

Dr. Howells: Network Rail advises that the train protection and warning system (TPWS) has no effect on line capacity.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are being taken to improve the reliability of the train protection and warning system, with reference to *(a)* delays to trains running into terminal stations and *(b)* drivers needing to apply power between the TPWS and the buffer stops. [126836]

Dr. Howells: Network Rail advises that the train protection and warning system (TPWS) has a good record of reliability. TPWS at buffer stops is set to intervene only if trains exceed 10mph. Network Rail is working with the train operators and their drivers to ensure that all trains are controlled to below this trigger point and to enter terminal stations at this low speed. Network Rail works with the train operators to assist drivers in controlling their train speeds into termini.

Rail Travel

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the average length of *(a)* journey and *(b)* time taken for train passengers to travel to and from the rail station. [125749]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passengers on average travelled on each diesel multiple unit train journey in the last year for which figures are available. [125750]

Dr. Howells: This information is not held centrally.

Railway Stations

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what station improvements are planned which are funded under *(a)* the Rail Passenger Partnership, *(b)* the Incremental Output Statements and *(c)* the Modern Facilities at Stations Scheme. [125687]

Mr. McNulty: Under the Strategic Rail Authority's Rail Passenger Partnership Scheme, there are a total of 30 schemes that have been approved for RPP funding, that include station improvements. Under the Strategic Rail Authority's Incremental Output Statement (IOS), Modern Facilities at Stations Scheme (MFAS), there are a further 68 stations that are under consideration by the authority.

Road Repairs (Deaths and Injuries)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people working on road repairs and improvements over each of the last three years have been *(a)* injured and *(b)* killed working on (i) motorways, (ii) other trunk roads and (iii) all other roads. [120672]

Mr. Jamieson *[pursuant to the answer of 4 July 2003, Official Report, c. 502W]*: The available information on numbers of people injured and killed while working on road repairs and improvements on motorways and other trunk roads in England over the last three years, as reported to the Highways Agency by its contractors, is shown in the table. Information for other roads is not available.

Reported casualties on motorways and other trunk roads in England: 2000–02

Year/severity	Motorway and trunk roads	Motorway	Trunk
2000			
Fatal	4	1	3
Injured	55	n/a	n/a
All	59	—	—
2001			
Fatal	3	2	1
Injured	73	n/a	n/a
All	76	—	—
2002			
Fatal	5	1	4
Injured	105	n/a	n/a
All	110	—	—

Note:
n/a = not available
Source:
Highways Agency

Road Schemes

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which statutory bodies will be involved in evaluating the potential environmental impacts of *(a)* route improvements to the A21 between Kippings Cross and Robertsbridge and *(b)* the building of the A259 Bexhill-Hastings link road. [126426]

Mr. Jamieson: In designing and evaluating potential road schemes, the Highways Agency works closely with the four statutory environmental bodies: the Environment Agency, English Nature, English Heritage and the Countryside Agency. The Local Transport Plan guidance places a similar requirement on local authorities bringing forward bids for major road and public transport schemes.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations he has received concerning the *(a)* projected cost and *(b)* timeframe of building an A259 Bexhill-Hastings link road; [126428]

(2) what representations he has received *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against the building of the A259 Bexhill-Hastings link road. [126427]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State has received a number of representations from individuals and bodies about this scheme. Among those in favour are the South East of England Regional Assembly, the South East of England Development Agency, East Sussex county council and some business organisations in the area. The four statutory environmental bodies are among those that have expressed concern over the proposal. The representation from the regional assembly asked that all study recommendations should be progressed quickly. The Secretary of State has asked East Sussex county council to progress the scheme in close liaison with the statutory environmental bodies.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received concerning the A21 from *(a)* Kippings Cross to Lamberhurst and *(b)* Flimwell to Robertsbridge. [126429]

Mr. Jamieson: By the closing date (24 March 2003) of the public consultation on these two improvements a total of 905 completed questionnaires and 341 letters had been received. As the questionnaire related to both schemes it is not possible to give figures for the split between the two schemes, however, 327 of the letters related to the Flimwell to Robertsbridge section with 14 related to the Kippings Cross to Lamberhurst section. After the closing date a further 31 letters were received, 24 related to Flimwell to Robertsbridge and seven to the Kippings Cross to Lamberhurst. In addition, a 1,540 signature petition and 159 responses from a questionnaire organised by Hurst Green parish council were also received. Responses were also received from all the local authorities along the route and from statutory and non-statutory environmental bodies.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the expected start date is for road improvements on the A21 from *(a)* Kippings Cross to Lamberhurst and *(b)* Flimwell to Robertsbridge. [126432]

Mr. Jamieson: These schemes are not yet in the Government's Targeted Programme of Improvements (TPI). A public consultation exercise was held recently and a report is expected from the Highways Agency in the autumn. We will make an announcement on these improvements following consideration of the report. If it is decided that either of these schemes should enter the TPI the announcement will include likely start dates.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on progress made by *(a)* East Sussex county council and *(b)* statutory environmental bodies in developing the A259 Bexhill-Hastings link road scheme, with particular reference to environmental considerations; [126433]

(2) what discussions the Department has held with *(a)* East Sussex county council and *(b)* statutory environmental bodies on environmental considerations in developing the A259 Bexhill-Hastings link road scheme. [126434]

Mr. Jamieson: On the 9 July 2003, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport invited East Sussex county council to develop proposals for Bexhill to Hastings Link Road, working closely with the statutory environmental bodies during the process.

My officials will be discussing details with East Sussex county council in the near future on how to take this work forward.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list new road construction schemes in East Sussex which have been allocated for design, build, finance and operate funding; and what the estimated cost of construction is at current prices. [126444]

Mr. Jamieson: There are currently no new road construction schemes in East Sussex which have been allocated for design build finance and operate funding.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the annual expenditure of his Department on public local inquiries in East Sussex was in each of the last 10 years; on what dates each inquiry was held; and what the cost was in each year. [126445]

Mr. Jamieson: One public local inquiry into road schemes has been held in East Sussex in the last 10 years. This inquiry was into three separate draft proposals on the A259 between Pevensey and Guestling Thorn including bypasses of Bexhill and Hastings and was held between October 1995 and July 1996. The estimated cost was in the region of £1 million.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what improvements are planned for the A259 over the next three years. [126446]

Mr. Jamieson: The section of the A259 between Brenzett and Folkestone will be detrunked in September this year, with responsibility for the identification and implementation of any future improvements being transferred to Kent county council. The remaining sections of the A259 trunk road, east of Hastings to Brenzett and west of Hastings to Pevensey, will remain the responsibility of the Highways Agency. A route management strategy is being prepared for these sections of the route, which will identify future local improvements. Improvements in future years will be dependent on the availability of funding.

There are seven improvement schemes programmed for the current financial year. These are:

Safety Schemes

Barnhorn Gateway, Bexhill—Provision of right turn facility, cycleways and gateway signing

Winchelsea Signs Review

Accessibility Schemes

Bexhill—Provision of controlled crossing as part of Safer Routes to School initiative

Bexhill Bus Stops—Increase in kerb heights to facilitate disabled access

De la Warr Road/King Offa Way Junction, Bexhill—Improvements to signals to aid right-turn and pedestrian movements

Road Renewal Schemes

Ferry Hill Landslip Remediation, Winchelsea

Strand Bridge to Harbour Road, Winchelsea to Rye

In addition to the above works, a number of studies of potential improvements to safety, the environment and integration are also being carried out.

Roads (Hampshire)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money his Department allocated to Hampshire county council for the maintenance of *(a)* principal roads and *(b)* minor roads in Hampshire in (i) 2003, (ii) 2002, (iii) 2001 and (iv) 2000; and what steps he has taken to monitor expenditure by the council in each case. [126378]

Mr. Jamieson: As part of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) process, we have allocated the following funds to Hampshire county council for the capital maintenance of principal roads, bridges and non-principal roads. It is for the Council to decide how best to allocate these resources between different maintenance priorities. The Council also receives revenue funding from the Government, although the amount for road maintenance is not identified separately. Use of these resources is monitored through the Annual Progress Report which all local highway authorities are required to submit to my Department.

	Allocation (£ million)
2000–01	4.388
2001–02[1]	14.921
2002–03	10.524
2003–04	13.156

[1] Includes £5.051 allocated in August 2001 for emergency repairs to flood damaged roads.

Severn Bridges

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what tolls are payable when using the Severn Bridges on emergency calls by *(a)* the Severn Area Rescue Association, *(b)* HM Coastguards vehicles, *(c)* Police vehicles, *(d)* ambulances and *(e)* Fire Service vehicles. [126393]

Mr. Jamieson: Vehicles being used in the discharge of the functions of a fire authority, vehicles being used for police purposes and ambulances are exempt from toll charges for using the Severn Bridges under the Severn Bridges Act 1992.

Arrangements are also in place to exempt vehicles belonging to the Severn Area Rescue Association and HM Coastguard from toll charges when using the Bridges for emergency purposes.

South Coast Multi-modal Study

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the projected cost of each recommendation contained in the South Coast multi modal study is; and what funding has been allocated to taking forward each recommendation. [126430]

Mr. Jamieson: The total estimated cost of the recommendations made by the South Coast multi modal study was £1.1 billion. This sum consists of:

Improvements to the trunk road network totalling £594 million, designed to reduce congestion bottlenecks and improve safety black spots;

Rail improvements totalling £109 million;

£26 million for bus measures;

£99 million for urban interventions and other local transport measures;

£283 million for light rail transit investment.

In response to these recommendations, the Secretary of State has asked the Highways Agency to take forward a number of road schemes, the costs for which will come from the resources allocated within the 10-year plan.

Local authorities are asked to work up a number of schemes and measures for submission via the local transport plan bid process. Where required, provision of funding will depend on the performance of schemes against appraisal criteria. On the rail side a significant programme of rail improvements is being taken forward which will support the objectives of the study. The SRA has also been asked to examine the scope for delivering the study's rail objectives as it develops its future programmes.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which recommendations contained in the South Coast multi modal study *(a)* have been approved, *(b)* have not been approved and *(c)* are still awaiting a final decision. [126431]

Mr. Jamieson: Our response to the South Coast multi-modal study, which was sent to MPs within the south-east as part of an announcement package, set out in detail where we have asked for further work to be undertaken by the respective delivery agencies. This includes where we have asked for schemes to be taken forward, where we have asked for schemes to be considered further or where to look at alternatives. Implementation of all schemes included in the announcement are subject to the successful completion of all necessary consultation and statutory procedures. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [126666]

Mr. McNulty: The Department was formed on 29 May 2002. Between that date and 31 March 2003, a departmental special adviser accompanied the Secretary of State to Strasbourg at a cost of £675.31. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Ministerial Code and Civil Service Management Code.

Speed Cameras (M25)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many and what percentage of speed cameras on the M25 are covered with not in use signs, broken down by junction. [126684]

Mr. Jamieson: Speed cameras have been installed on the M25 in Essex in preparation for major roadworks starting this month. They are covered until the roadworks commence.

Speed Humps

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the impact of speed humps on the *(a)* environment, *(b)* suspension systems of motor vehicles and *(c)* response times of emergency vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [126514]

Mr. Jamieson: The Traffic Management and Air Quality (TRAMAQ) research programme is looking at the impact of traffic management techniques, including road humps, on vehicle emissions and air quality. Further information on this programme is available on the Department's website [http:www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_roads/documents/page/dft_roads_508003.hcsp#TopOfPage].

My Department has a current research project looking into the impact of road humps on vehicles and their occupants. As part of this project the suspension of vehicles will be examined after repeated runs over a range of road humps. The results of this project will be available towards the end of this year.

The Department has not specifically assessed the impact of road humps on response times for emergency vehicles. However, local authorities are required to consult the emergency services prior to installing road humps to ensure minimal delay to their vehicles.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidelines he has issued to local authorities in respect of the size, height and positioning of speed humps on roads; and whether he plans changes thereto. [126515]

Mr. Jamieson: "The highways (Road Humps) Regulations 1999" cover the dimensions and positioning of road humps. In addition, my Department has issued guidelines on the construction of road humps in the form of the Traffic Advisory Leaflet series; a full list of these is available in TAL 5/01 "Traffic Calming Bibliography" There are no current plans to alter either the regulations or guidance.

Strategic Rail Plan

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what revisions have been made to the 10-year strategic rail plan since January. [125510]

Mr. McNulty: None. The next version of the Strategic Rail Authority's strategic plan will be published in January 2004.

Transport Investment (Yorkshire)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his statement of 9 July, on investment in transport, what projects he intends to announce for *(a)* North Yorkshire and *(b)* Vale of York. [125656]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State's statement of 9 July concerned the Government's response to a number of multi-modal studies, none of which covered North Yorkshire and the Vale of York. However, new projects for the upgrading of the A1 between Dishforth and Barton and for the dualling of the A66 in North Yorkshire were announced on 25 June 2002 and 22 August 2002 respectively in response to safety studies undertaken on these routes.

Vehicle and Operator Services Agency

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the operating costs of the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency were in each of the last

five years; and how many staff it employed in each year. [125542]

Mr. Jamieson: The Vehicle and Operator Services Agency was formed on 1 April 2003 following a merger between the Vehicle Inspectorate Executive Agency and the Traffic Area Network division of the Department for Transport. Details of operating costs and staff numbers for the former organisations over the last five years are shown in the table.

	2002–03	*2001–02*	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*
Vehicle Inspectorate					
Operating costs £000	100,803	87,929	74,614	64,924	58,474
Staff numbers (average)	2,201	2,036	1,902	1,808	1,726
Traffic Area Network					
Operating costs £000	15,451	15,504	12,070	11,666	10,572
Staff numbers (average)	313	316	325	317	304

Walking Strategy

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what progress he has made against the targets set in the 1997 walking strategy; [126548]

(2) what recent research he has conducted into the average annual distance walked by a UK *(a)* adult and *(b)* child in each of the last six years; [126549]

(3) if he will make a statement on the walking-related spending in the 10-year transport plan for each year of the plan; and what walking-related spending was allocated in the last six years of local transport plans. [126550]

Dr. Howells: My Department has no walking targets, but the National Travel Survey shows that the average distance walked in Great Britain each year by adults (16 years and over) and children (under 16 years) for the last six periods for which data are available is as follows:

Miles per person per year

	Adults (16+)	*Children (under 16)*
1994–96	197	208
1995–97	193	200
1996–98	191	201
1997–99	189	198
1998–2000	190	200
1999–2001	186	200

The National Travel Survey excludes walks of less than 50 yards and those that are away from the public highway unless both the surface is paved or tarred and there is unrestricted access.

The Government are providing very generous transport investment funds to local authorities—amounting to £19 billion over the 10-year plan period. However, we do not ring-fence funds specifically for walking schemes. The Government believe local authorities should be able take an integrated approach, using investment funds in the way that best suits local circumstances. Our approach to funding reflects this. Decisions about walking-related spending are therefore for local authorities. The Government require local authorities to plan better facilities for walkers, and report what they have delivered. We take this information into account in our decisions on overall funding allocations.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what additional charges Network Rail will make to express train operators for each express train path, following the upgrade of the west coast main line. [125753]

Dr. Howells: The rail regulator is currently conducting an interim review of Network Rail's track access charges payable by franchised passenger operators. As part of this he is considering the costs that Network Rail will incur and the scope for efficiency savings both in relation to the west coast route modernisation and the rest of the work that Network Rail has to undertake.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many extra passengers he estimates will be carried each day on the west coast mainline following the upgrade of the route. [125760]

Dr. Howells: The Strategic Rail Authority's plan for the west coast main line upgrade, published in June, envisages an increase in passengers of between 15 per cent. and 25 per cent. between London and Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Department since 29 October 2002. [126616]

Mr. McNulty: In the period 29 October 2002 to 15 July 2003, the Department for Transport has made 47 written ministerial statements.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Hare Coursing

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what rules govern the import of live hares for coursing from the Republic of Ireland into Northern Ireland; and what assessment he has made of compliance with the rules in 2002. [123749]

Mr. Pearson: Hares are rabies susceptible animals, and as such, are covered by the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) Order (Northern Ireland) 1977.

Under normal circumstances, there are no import restrictions on hares coming from the Republic of Ireland into Northern Ireland.

However, there are two exceptions.

The first exception is the import of a hare from the Republic of Ireland which has previously been brought to the Republic of Ireland from a country other than GB, the Channel Islands, Isle of Man or Northern Ireland and has not been detained and isolated in quarantine for a period of at least six months before entering Northern Ireland. The second exception is where my Department has reason to believe that there is an outbreak of rabies in the Republic of Ireland.

In both cases, the importation of a hare is prohibited, except under and in accordance with, the conditions of a licence granted by the Department. The conditions would include the immediate detention and isolation in quarantine for a period of six months.

Neither of the exceptions arose during 2002.

Mental Health Review

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Mental Health Review will be *(a)* completed and *(b)* published; and if he will make a statement. [124695]

Angela Smith: In October 2002, DHSSPS initiated a wide-ranging independent review of the law, policy and service provision affecting people with a mental health problem or a learning disability. The review will involve a comprehensive evaluation of the Mental Health (NI) Order 1986, which includes provision for those with a learning disability. It will take into account recent policy and other developments here and in the European Union, and address how best to provide services to people with a mental health problem or a learning disability in accordance with the statutory equality obligations of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, with the Human Rights Act 1998, and to promote their social inclusion. The review will also address how to promote positive mental health in society.

The Mental Health and Learning Disability Review is therefore expected to take until mid-2005 to complete. It may be possible, however, to publish some of the recommendations during 2004.

North-South Bodies

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* the names of those serving on each of the north-south bodies set up under the Belfast Agreement, *(b)* the terms and conditions of their appointments and *(c)* the rates of pay and allowances for each person. [123805]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The names and details of the terms of office of those currently serving on the Boards of the Trade and Business Development Body, the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission and the North/South Language Body, together with the Advisory Board of the Food Safety Promotion Board, were placed in the Library on 7 April 2003. The rates of remuneration payable to Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons and Board Members are detailed in the following table. Travelling expenses are reimbursed for attendance at meetings.

Rates of remuneration

	£	Euro
Chairperson	6,400	10,157.90
Vice-chairperson	5,200	8,253.30
Member	4,000	6,348.69

Note.
£ = €1.587

Post-primary Education

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met representatives from the *(a)* Primary Principals Association of Northern Ireland and *(b)* Grammar School Principals; and what plans he has to meet each group in the future. [125536]

Jane Kennedy: The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and his Ministers have not met with representatives from the Primary Principals Association of Northern Ireland or with Grammar School Principals.

However, officials from the Department of Education last met with representatives from the Primary Principals Association of Northern Ireland on 25 March 2003. Although there is no officially recognized grouping of Grammar School Principals, the Minister and officials meet regularly with individual principals from grammar schools and with organisations, which include principals of grammar schools such as the Secondary Heads Association.

There are no plans at present for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to meet with representatives from the Primary Principals Association of Northern Ireland or with Grammar School Principals.

Recycling

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures have been taken to introduce a doorstep recycling service for every household in Northern Ireland. [125548]

Angela Smith: The Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy, published by the Department of the Environment in March 2000, provides a framework for developing waste management practices to increase recycling rates and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. A key element of the Strategy is the preparation of Waste Management Plans by district councils, as required by Article 23 of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997.

Waste Management Plans covering all of Northern Ireland are now in place, and are currently being implemented. The plans were adopted following extensive public consultation throughout each district council area; they set out the full range of activities and facilities to be put in place to provide a recycling service to the people of Northern Ireland, taking account of the needs and circumstances of individual district councils.

The activities and facilities to be put in place include a mix of kerbside collection for individual households and home composting schemes, and the development of new and enhanced civic amenity sites and recycling centres. The plans are geared towards achieving the primary target set out in the Waste Management Strategy of recovering 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005.

Smoking

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to ban smoking in public places in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [125946]

Angela Smith: A Five-Year Tobacco Action Plan for Northern Ireland was published on 8 July 2003. The Plan does not propose an outright ban on smoking in public places; rather it stresses the importance of building on changes in public attitudes towards tobacco use, if the overall aim of creating a tobacco-free society is to be met. With this in mind, the Plan includes a series of actions designed to promote the provision of smoke-free premises and facilities.

A copy of the Plan has been placed in the House Library.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many responses he has received to the Five-Year Tobacco Action Plan consultation document; and if he will make a statement on the responses received. [126075]

Angela Smith: Ninety-three responses were received. Overall there was broad support for the content of the Plan. A summary of the responses is available on the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's website at: www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/publications/2003/tobaccoplanresponses.pdf

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to accelerate the introduction of the tobacco strategy for Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [126078]

Angela Smith: The Five-Year Tobacco Action Plan contains 24 separate action points, complete with details of the key organisations responsible for their implementation. Each action point incorporates a target date and an Implementation Group will be established shortly to take forward the actions within the specified timescales.

HEALTH

Notifiable Diseases

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research he has commissioned into the effectiveness of legislation covering notifiable diseases; what plans he has to propose changes to this legislation; and if he will make a statement. [124792]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We announced in "Getting Ahead of the Curve", the strategy for health protection published by the Chief Medical Officer in January 2002, that we intend to carry out a review of the infectious disease law.

Old People's Homes

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many state-run old people's homes there are in England; what funding they receive; and what contributions pensioners are expected to make. [124054]

Dr. Ladyman: At 31 March 2001 there were 1,190 council-run homes for older people in England. This figure includes council-run homes for older mentally ill people.

Councils do not receive direct funding for care homes that they run themselves. Councils are given a financial provision for the social services they provide or commission through the Formula Spending Share (FSS) and grants. Generally, it is for councils to decide how much of that provision to spend on care homes.

The National Assistance (Assessment of Resources) Regulations 1992 sets out how residents' contributions to their cost of their care should be determined. The Regulations apply to adults of all ages. Councils will need to establish in each case what income, savings and capital should be taken into account. Residents with assets in excess on £19,500 should fund their own care costs. Where residents has assets between £19,500 and £12,000 councils provide increasing support until the lower capital limit is reached, at which point councils provide full support. With regard to residents' income, all or most of it is taken into account although each resident should be left with at least a personal expenses allowance of £17.50.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in appraising the drug Memantine for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease; and if he will make a statement. [124980]

Dr. Ladyman: The anticipated publication date of guidance by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is May 2005. Details of the anticipated publication date of all NICE guidance can be found on the NICE web site at: www.nice.org.uk

In the meantime, guidance issued in August 1999 to all National Health Service bodies asked them to continue with local arrangements for the managed introduction of new technologies where guidance from NICE is not available at the time the technology first became available. These arrangements should involve an assessment of all the relevant factors including the available evidence on the clinical effectiveness of the treatment.

Bush Meat

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the organisms which are known to exist in imported bushmeat; and what the consequences are of infection in humans. [125188]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Like any raw meat, there is a risk that raw bushmeat may be contaminated with food poisoning micro-organisms, such as E. coli 0157, Campylobacter and Salmonella. Other contaminants of bushmeat: could include parasites, viruses and the bacteria that can cause anthrax, tuberculosis and

brucellosis. Although these organisms have the potential to cause human infection, United Kingdom public health bodies involved in the investigation of outbreaks of infectious intestinal disease have not traced any outbreaks of human disease in the UK to the illegal importation of meat. Where local authorities identify bushmeat that has been illegally imported, it must be destroyed.

Cancer Patient Survey

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to repeat the national cancer patient survey which was published in 2002; and what the planned timetable is. [126159]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The responsibility for carrying out future patient surveys now rests with the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI). CHI is looking at a number of factors before deciding when the next cancer patient survey will take place. Further analysis is also being carried out on the last cancer survey data to identify variations within and between trusts on various cancer types. Results of this, along with the analysis commissioned by the Department of Health, will be used to inform plans for a future survey.

Cancer Treatment

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on improving information given to patients following diagnosis of cancer with respect to *(a)* prognosis, *(b)* probability of the cancer spreading, *(c)* treatment options and *(d)* the genetic implications for other family members. [125027]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Cancer Plan, published in September 2000, acknowledged the importance of ensuring patients have access to appropriate information at each stage of the care pathway and made a commitment to improving the content and availability of patient information.

Since the publication of the Cancer Plan, we have set up the Coalition for Cancer Information as a result of a recommendation from the Cancer Information Advisory Group. The Coalition, which includes members from key voluntary sector and national health service organisations, is now working to ensure that high quality information is delivered to patients and carers which is appropriate to their particular needs and will enable them to make informed decisions at: each stage.

In addition, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is currently preparing guidance for the NHS on supportive and palliative care. The draft guidance includes a chapter on information and recommends that all provider organisations should have a range of different information materials which is accessible and free at the point of delivery and that patients should be offered help to understand the materials they are given. The draft guidance is now out for consultation and can be found on the NICE website at www.nice.orq.uk. The final guidance is expected to be published early next year.

Cardiology Services

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting times have been in each of the last six years for cardiology appointments; and if he will make a statement. [126006]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The average waiting times for cardiology appointments in each of the last six years is shown in the table.

	Average waiting times (weeks)
1997–98	6.77
1998–99	7.43
1999–2000	7.95
2000–01	8.15
2001–02	6.83
2002–03	6.34

At Quarter 4 of 2002–03, 81 per cent. of patients were seen within two weeks of referral by their general practitioner or other clinician.

Chemicals

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on human health of textile and leather finishing treatments; what advice has been given to the public relating to their use; and if he will make a statement. [119084]

Mr. Browne: I have been asked to reply.

No assessment has been made for such treatments.

In the case of finishing treatments used in workplaces, there are duties placed on employers to carry out assessments of any hazardous substances that may be present in such treatments and to put in place appropriate workplace control measures. HSE has issued a series of information sheets on controlling the hazards from dyes and chemicals in textiles finishing, which includes guidance on the particular risks to employees from reactive dyes and spotting solvents. Copies have been placed in the Library and are available at www.hse.gov.uk/textiles/dvestuffs.htm

Some of the chemicals that may be used in such treatments have been assessed, or are currently undergoing assessment under the EU Existing Substances Regulation (ESR) or within the OECD Existing Chemicals programme. Risk assessment that have been agreed by all EU member states have been placed in the Library and are made publicly available on the internet, via the website of the European Chemicals Bureau (ECB) at http://ecb.jrc.it/existing-chemicals/

Child Obesity

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the relationship between rates of obesity in children and levels of physical activity. [122389]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The effective prevention and management of obesity requires an integrated, cross-government approach, working with a range of partners on programmes to improve diet and increase physical activity levels.

In the five years between 1996 and 2001, the proportion of obese children aged six to 15 years rose by 3.5 per cent. Over the same period physical activity levels have fallen due to a combination of factors and four in ten boys and six in 10 girls are not meeting the recommended hour a day of physical activity for children.

Lower levels of activity in daily life are likely to have contributed to the rise in obesity. Physical activity levels in developed countries appear to have fallen due to a combination of factors—including greater use of cars for short journeys, lower sports participation, and greater access to television and computers and other sedentary activities.

To ensure that there is a co-ordinated and strategic approach to the planning and delivery of sport and physical activity across a diverse range of sectors—such as transport, countryside management and town planning—a sport and physical activity board (SPAB) has been established. The Board is to be jointly led by the Department of Health and Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

Another key project in our programme of work are the local exercise action pilots (LEAP) which we jointly fund with Sport England and the Countryside Agency. LEAP will test the effectiveness of primary care trust led interventions to increase access and levels of physical activity in communities based in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas. Activities range from walking, cycling and swimming, to clinical-based programmes that are focusing on diabetes and weight management.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken in Shrewsbury and Atcham to reduce obesity in children in Shrewsbury and Atcham. [126639]

Dr. Ladyman: The Government are committed to tackling the rising trend in childhood obesity. The prevention and management of obesity are at the heart of many of the Government's priority areas, as highlighted in the NHS Plan and national service frameworks (NSF) particularly those outlining action on coronary heart disease and diabetes. The forth coming NSF for children will address the health and social care needs of all children and will include the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity. A two pronged approach is being taken, addressing both overweight and obesity prevention and management at national, regional and local level.

Shropshire County Primary Care Trust is involved in a number of initiatives. These include:

A Family Food Project to promote healthy lifestyles and healthy eating among children;

The Healthy School Initiative which promotes healthy eating and physical activity in schools;

The Free Fruit Scheme which involves 82 per cent. of eligible schools; and

A Walking Bus Pilot Project at Westbury school which is encouraging children to walk to school.

Clinical Devices (Bacteraemia)

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the classes of clinical device which are most closely linked with bacteraemia. [126002]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Voluntary surveillance data[1] show that almost two-thirds of bacteraemias of known origin were associated with an intravascular device or device-related infections, such as a catheter associated urinary tract infection.

Central intravenous catheters were the commonest associated source of hospital acquired bacteraemia.

[1] Public Health Laboratory Service. Nosocomial Infection National Surveillance Service.
Surveillance of hospital acquired bacteraemia in English hospitals. 1997–2002.

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of catheter associated urinary tract infection in each of the last three years. [126005]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Data on the cost to the national health service of catheter associated urinary tract infections are not collected centrally.

However, a research study[1] carried out in one hospital in the 1990s estimated that the cost of a hospital acquired urinary tract infection was, on average, equivalent to an additional £1,327 per patient during the stay in hospital.

[1] R. Plowman, N. Graves, M. Griffin, J. A. Roberts, A. V. Swan, B. Cookson, L. Taylor. The socio-economic burden of hospital acquired infection. Public Health Laboratory Service 1999.

Clinical Instruments

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will hold an inquiry into the use of single use instruments for tonsillectomies. [126490]

Mr. Hutton: In March 2002, the Department of Health and the British Association of Otorhinolaryngologists—Head and Neck Surgeons (BAO-HNS) carried out a comprehensive review of tonsil and adenoid surgery across the country. This followed advice from the Department that, in the interest of the safety of patients, surgeons should not use single use instruments for tonsil and adenoid surgery. The review found that many National Health Service trusts did not collect the data at the time of the operation and that therefore much of it was unreliable.

To get better information the Department is providing £250,000 to fund the Royal College of Surgeons and the BAO-HNS to carry out a national audit of tonsil and adenoid surgery. As this audit is ongoing, I do not believe that an inquiry is required, but I will keep this under consideration.

Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 10 July, *Official Report*, column 1002W, on the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health, what the non staff costs

are in (*a*) 2003–04 and (*b*) 2004–05; and what the value of contract for supporting patients forum is for each primary care trust. [126324]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health's (CPPIH) budget was discussed at its board meeting on 29 May. The board paper is available at its website at www.cppih.org. It includes a breakdown of staff and non-staff costs for 2003–04. Information relating to the budget breakdown for 2004–05 is not yet available.

Contracts for supporting patients' forums have not yet been awarded—more information about individual local network providers will be available from the CPPIH in September.

Consultation Documents

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the consultation documents issued by his Department in each of the last four years; what the cost was of producing each of these; how many documents were issued in each consultation; and how many responses were received in each consultation. [124569]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government recommends that policy development should be done in close consultation with stakeholders. Formal consultation documents are one part only of this process, which includes:

Stakeholder meetings
Listening events/public meetings
Web forums
Public surveys
Focus groups
Regional events
Free-phone and freepost surveys and events
Targeted leaflet campaigns
Road shows and exhibitions

It is standard practice for departments to evaluate the policy development process, including the use of consultation. The specific information requested is not collated on a central basis and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, a list of consultation exercises run by the Department of Health since May 2001 is available at www.doh.gov.uk/consultations/.

Contraception Pill

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women have taken an emergency contraception pill in the last year. [124105]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Based on results from the Office of National Statistics Omnibus Survey in 2001–02, it is estimated that approximately 900,000 women in England used hormonal emergency contraception at least once in the previous year.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what cushion funding is included in the delayed discharge grant for each local authority for 2003–04. [126839]

Dr. Ladyman: All local authorities have been allocated their full share of the £50 million Delayed Discharges Grant. 10 local authorities have received top-up funding totalling £0.8 million in addition to their allocations under the Delayed Discharges Grant 2003–04, so that the total grant is £50.8 million. This means that all local authorities should receive more in grant than they are liable to pay in reimbursement charges, if the level of delayed discharges reduces from the situation recorded in March 2003.

The extra councils and their individual top-up allocations are shown in the table.

Top-up allocations

£ million

Local authority	*Extra funding*
Hampshire	0.280
Surrey	0.119
Reading	0.102
Darlington	0.096
Brighton and Hove	0.089
Bracknell Forest	0.048
Lambeth	0.031
Hillingdon	0.022
West Berkshire	0.011
Sutton	0.001
Total	0.800

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on delayed discharges. [126489]

Dr. Ladyman: The latest figures on delayed discharge (March 2003), which are available in the Library, show that there were approximately 3,000 patients aged over 75 years experiencing delayed discharge from hospital on any one day in March 2003, compared with 5,673 over 75s in September 2001. This figure has almost halved since the Government made extra funding available to councils to tackle delayed discharges.

Departmental Policies (Pendle)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what policies (*a*) initiated and (*b*) managed by his Department since 2001 have had an impact on Pendle; and if he will make a statement. [124095]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Detailed information on the impact of the Department's policies nationally is set out in the Department of Health Annual reports. A copy of the most recent report "The Government's Expenditure Plans, Departmental Report 2003, Department of Health" is available in the Library and on the Department of Health's website at www.doh.gov.uk/dohreport/report2003/Chapt1.pdf

My hon. Friend's constituency falls within the geographical area covered by Burnley Health Care National Health Service Trust and the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Primary Care Trust (PCT).

Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale PCT general allocations on behalf of its resident population since 2001 is set out in the table. Prior to the establishment of the PCT in April 2002, Pendle was encompassed within the East Lancashire Health Authority.

Allocations since 2001 covering Pendle

Health Authority/Primary Care Trust	Year	Unified allocations (£000)	Cash increase (£000)	Cash increase (percentage)	Real terms increase (£000)	Real terms increase (percentage)
East Lancashire HA	2001–02	416,738	34,521	9.03	24,357	6.37
East Lancashire HA	2002–03	461,132	40,678	9.74	29,496	7.06
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale PCT	2003–04	241,264	20,080	9.08	14,771	6.68
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale PCT	2004–05	264,963	23,699	9.82	16,857	7.14
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale PCT	2005–06	289,574	24,611	9.29	16,744	6.62

A snapshot of how the Department's policies have impacted on Pendle can be seen as follows. This is by no means a comprehensive list.

£445,000 for the modernisation of facilities for accident and emergency (A&E) patients and a telemedicine link.

This was awarded to Burnley General Hospital as part of the national A&E Modernisation programme. The modernisation work (completed in June 2000) has helped to improve patient flow, improve paediatric services and increase privacy and dignity, and the telemedicine link has reduced waiting times through speedier first line treatment.

Additional repetitive investment £800,000 in mental health services, which exceeds earmarked resources.

The investment is to support additional consultant psychiatrists, low secure provision, additional prescribing of atypical anti-psychotic drugs and complex packages of care in the independent sector, whilst ensuring the implementation of the national service framework (NSF) for mental health.

Development of a waiting, booking and choice initiative.

The Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale PCT is developing a scheme that will enable advance access in primary care, allowing patients to gain access to primary care professionals on the same day.

The Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale PCT is a second wave local investment finance trust (LIFT) pilot site.

It is envisaged that over the next three years development will be under way to provide new primary care facilities that are fit to deliver health and social care in innovative ways that meet the needs of the local community.

Implementation of the NSF for older people.

The milestones for improved services for strokes, falls and intermediate care are expected to be met by April 2004

Total investment in excess of £1.1 million for cancer treatment equipment based at Burnley Healthcare NHS Trust

The trust received a computed tomography (CT) scanner in October 2001 and they have also been awarded an mirror resonance imaging (MRI) scanner from the New Opportunities Fund Coronary Heart Disease programme, which is expected to be delivered in the very near future.

Current waiting list information for Burnley Health Care NHS Trust is shown in the tables.

Waiting times for first consultant out-patient appointment: Burnley Health Care NHS Trust

GP written referrals	Quarter—Q4 2002–03
Patients seen	
Total	9,894
Percentage seen within 13 weeks	70
Patients still waiting	
More than 13 weeks	876
More than 26 weeks	0

Source:
Department of Health form QM08

Patients waiting for elective admission: Burnley Health Care NHS Trust

	Month end—May 2003
Total waiting list	4,595
Patients waiting over nine months	392
Patients waiting over 12 months	0

Source:
Department of Health form KH07

Departmental Staff

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for redeployment of members of his Department out of London and the South East. [125388]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The scope for relocating Government activity is being considered by Sir Michael Lyons. His independent review was announced by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the Budget Statement on 9 April.

Details of the review, including the consultation launched on 19 June, can be found on the Her Majesty's Treasury's website at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk.

Sir Michael will report his findings on the scope for relocating Departments and other public sector bodies before the end of the year.

Drug Treatment

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were referred by their GP for drug addiction treatment in the last two years. [121839]

Miss Melanie Johnson: 24,605 patients were recorded as being referred for drug treatment by general practitioners or psychiatrists in the last two years, to 31 March 2001, for which figures are available. However the actual number may be higher because over the same period the source of referral was not recorded in a further 19,223 cases.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the waiting time targets for *(a)* in-patient detoxification, *(b)* community prescribing by specialist,

(c) community prescribing by GP, *(d)* structured counselling, *(e)* structured day care and *(f)* residential rehabilitation have been met. [124076]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The National Treatment Agency (NTA)'s April 2003 target of four or six weeks wait, depending on the type of treatment, has been achieved in most areas of the country and for most types of treatment. We are also on target to achieve the April 2004 target of a two or three week wait, again depending on the kind of treatment. However, average waits for in-patient detoxification and residential rehabilitation are both exceeding the national target by one week. Areas which exceed these averages are being targeted by the NTA.

Drug Reactions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the nurse reporting figures for adverse drug reactions were for each month since the scheme started, broken down by those under the *(a)* e-yellow card and *(b)* paper based yellow card scheme. [124563]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Reports of suspected adverse drug reactions (ADRs) to medicines are collated by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and the Committee on Safetyof Medicines (CSM) through the spontaneous reporting scheme, the Yellow Card Scheme.

The table shows the number of suspected adverse drug reaction reports which the CSM/MHRA have received each month from nurses since the scheme was launched on 31October 2002, broken down by:

electronic Yellow Cards received via the MHRA/CSM internet website

paper based reports.

The table shows figures related to the number of reports received. Some reports may contain more than one suspected ADR.

Month Received	*Total Nurse Reports*	*Electronic Yellow Cards*	*Paper Based Yellow Cards*
Oct 2002	5	0	5
Nov 2002	240	3	237
Dec 2002	81	1	80
Jan 2003	54	2	52
Feb 2003	267	0	267
Mar 2003	223	8	215
Apr 2003	113	2	111
May 2003	102	6	96
Jun 2003	118	4	114
Total	1,203	26	1,177

Eating Disorders

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the maximum travelling distance is for patients with anorexia to travel to specialist health care services. [125097]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on Wednesday 16 July. Information is not collected centrally about the travelling distances that may be involved when patients are referred for treatment for this severe condition. However, Professor Louis Appleby, national director for mental health, is leading a new programme of work to review provision of specialised services in a number of areas. Specialised services for people with anorexia are being considered first. Alongside the guideline being developed by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, this will be of great benefit to those with responsibility for developing services for this severe condition.

Entitlement Card Scheme

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department has had with the Home Office about the *(a)* possible introduction of an entitlement card scheme, *(b)* the use to which such a card would be put on the matters for which he is responsible and *(c)* the costs and funding of the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [124941]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer Friday 11 July]:* There have been discussions between the Department of Health and the Home Office about a number of issues since the publication of the Government's consultation paper on entitlement cards and identity fraud. These have included circumstances where National Health Service staff need to check the identity of patients, strategies for reducing fraud, the current use of the NHS number for NHS purposes, the importance of protecting confidentiality of health information and various technical issues.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the EU directives implemented by the Department since 8 June 2001. [126598]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health has led on the implementation of nine Directives and two Regulations since 8 June 2001. The Food Standards Agency (FSA), which deals with issues of food safety, has led with the implementation of 11 Directives since 8 June 2001. The number of Regulations, which FSA are responsible for, and have direct effect in UK law is 19. A full list of these have been placed in the Library.

EU Medical Research

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what level of priority is given to rheumatoid arthritis under EU Framework Programme 6; [125261]

(2) if he will list the funding areas for medical research under EU Framework Programme 6, and those proposed for Framework Programme 7; [125262]

(3) what levels of funding are allocated for research into *(a)* autoimmune diseases and *(b)* rheumatoid arthritis under EU Framework Programme 6; and what sums are expected under Framework Programme 7; [125263]

(4) if he will make it his policy to press for *(a)* autoimmune disease to be a specific funding area under EU Framework Programme 7, and *(b)* rheumatoid arthritis to be included as one of the key autoimmune disease. [125264]

Dr. Ladyman: The broad priority areas for medical research funded under Framework Programme 6 are described in Specific Programme 1: "Integrating and strengthening the European Research Area" (2002–06).

This document is available on the website of the Community Research & Development Information Service at www.cordis.lu. Also available are the work programmes for the first two calls for proposals issued under Thematic Priority 1 (Life Sciences, Genomics and Biotechnology for Health) within Specific Programme 1. Chronic inflammation and autoimmunity are identified as important areas in these work programmes and a number of related topics are listed. The budgets allocated to each work programme are not broken down to the level of individual topics.

The European Commission is not expected to announce its proposals for Framework Programme 7 (FP7) until 2005. The Government plans to carry out a public consultation on the United Kingdom policy lines for FP7 by early 2004. The Department of Health will seek to ensure that the content of FP7 reflects the research priorities and clinical needs of the UK.

European Constitution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with *(a)* colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and *(b)* counterparts in the European Union about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European constitution. [124779]

Mr. Hutton: Department of Health officials and I have had regular correspondence and meetings with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss all aspects of the Convention on the Future of Europe, including legislative competencies. We have also been in regular contact with colleagues in member and accession states. Contact is expected to be maintained throughout the forthcoming Inter-Governmental Conference, expected to begin in October, to ensure that the United Kingdom's key objectives are met.

Fluoridation

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make fluoridation of the water supply compulsory. [125641]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 14 July 2003]:* The Government has no plans to make fluoridation of the water supply compulsory. No water supply will be fluoridated unless the population that it serves is in favour. Amendments to the Water Bill, agreed on 9 July in Another Place, provide for regulations to be made on the local consultations that strategic health authorities will be required to undertake before making any arrangements with a water undertaker to have their water fluoridated.

Fraudulent Prescriptions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation has been carried out into the success of financial rewards for the identification of fraudulent prescriptions. [126092]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* The Pharmacy Reward Scheme was introduced in 1999 to reward community pharmacists who detected the attempted fraudulent use of prescription forms. The scheme was revised in February 2003, to provide an increased reward and a simplified claim process. It is expected that there will be an evaluation of the revised scheme in 2004.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated cost to the NHS of fraudulent prescriptions was in each of the last five years in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* the West Midlands and *(c)* Coventry. [126093]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* The National Health Service Counter Fraud and Security Management Service has an on-going programme of highly accurate risk measurement exercises designed to reveal levels of losses and, through repeated exercises, reduction in such losses. The National Audit Office has audited this process and is satisfied to its accuracy. Phase one of these exercises, examining patient fraud losses, included pharmaceutical patient fraud. The table shows these results.

Pharmaceutical patient fraud

£ million

Year data selected	*Fraud losses*
1998–99	117
1999–2000	69

A statistically valid sample of those prescriptions prescribed during March 2003 has been taken for a further measurement exercise to be completed. Further fraud reductions are anticipated and the figures will be produced later this year.

Pharmacies in the West Midlands and Coventry may have been routinely included in the measurement programme but figures were not categorised into specific cities or regions.

There was no accurate measurement of pharmaceutical patient fraud prior to the commencement of these exercises in 1998–99.

Point of dispensing checks were introduced in all community pharmacies on 1 April 1999 to help deter this type of fraud. The check requires pharmacists to ask patients who are claiming free prescriptions if they have evidence to support their claim to exemption from prescription charges.

General Practitioners

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs with Special Interests are working in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* South Sefton Primary Care Trust; and how many he estimates will be working in the UK by 2004. [124343]

Mr. Hutton: The latest published data show that, in March 2002, there were around 650 general practitioners with a special interest in England, including two in the South Sefton Primary Care Trust. Figures for March 2003 will be available shortly.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to recruit more general practitioners in the London Borough of Havering; and if he will make a statement on GP numbers in the Borough. [122201]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of general medical practitioners in Havering Primary Care Trust is shown in the table.

General medical practitioners in Havering Primary Care Trust

	All practitioners[1]
2001	122
2002	124

[1] All practitioners include UPEs, restricted principals, GP registrars, assistants, salaried doctors (Para 52 SFA), PMS others and GP retainers.

We are committed to increasing the general practitioner (GP) workforce and have introduced a range of measures to improve GP recruitment and retention. These include financial incentives to new and returning GPs and older GPs who delay their retirement from the national health service, a GP returners campaign and the newly launched Flexible Career Scheme which will help to create additional part-time and flexible posts within general practice.

Havering PCT is working to make Havering a more attractive proposition for GPs to work in. Some of the areas being progressed are the development of specialists GPs and a means of retaining registrars after they qualify. Havering PCT is also fully engaged in the international recruitment campaign for GPs.

Health and Safety

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the health and safety regime in NHS buildings; what plans he has to change the system; and if he will make a statement. [126357]

Mr. Hutton: The health and safety of national health service premises is a matter for individual NHS trusts. The Department of Health will be issuing a NHS Occupational Health and Safety Strategy for England in the autumn this year in response to the National Audit Office report, "A Safer Place to Work: Improving the management of health and safety risks to staff in NHS trusts".

Health Protection Agency

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in which areas service level agreements are not yet signed to ensure that the central Health Protection Agency is receiving the information it needs to perform its role in public health; and if he will make a statement. [125011]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Health Protection Agency (HPA) is continuing to receive the information it needs to perform its public health role and its public health services are continuing on a "business as usual" basis. The HPA is actively involved in discussions with national health service trusts to finalise Service Level Agreements as a basis for the future needs and development of public health services. There has been no change in the national level of laboratory reporting to the HPA's Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre since the establishment of the HPA.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on coverage of food, water, environmental and microbiology testing for the purposes of public health since the establishment of the Health Protection Agency and the consequent transfer of responsibilities; and if he will make a statement. [125013]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We are not aware of any representations to this Department on the coverage of food, water or environmental microbiology testing for the purposes of public health since the establishment of the Health Protection Agency (HPA). These services are commissioned by the HPA or provided by its own laboratories on the same basis as previously organised by the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS). The transition from the PHLS to the HPA has been implemented on a 'business as usual' basis.

Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on ending of the Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System; and what discussions he has had with the Department of Trade and Industry on this matter. [122478]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 30 June 2003]:* The decision to end the Home Accident Surveillance System is a matter for the Department for Trade and Industry.

However the decision took into account work by the Department of Health on how to improve the local surveillance of accidental injury.

Hospital-acquired Infections

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Belfast, East of 3 July, *Official Report*, column 1425W, on hospital infections, (1) how many cases were reported in each year since 1996, broken down by *(a)* trust and *(b)* pathogenic organism; [124887]

(2) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Belfast, East of 3 July, *Official Report*, column 485W, on hospital infections, when a mandatory surveillance scheme for each health care associated infection will be introduced; and in each case whether it will be collected and published, broken down by Trust. [124899]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* Data on hospital infections by trust are only available for methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) blood stream infections. Information from 1996 is not available, as this first phase of the mandatory surveillance system for healthcare associated infection started in2001. Results for the first year of this scheme (April 2001 to March 2002) were published by individual Trust in the Communicable Disease Report Weekly on 20 June 2002. They are available at www.phls.co.uk/publications/cdr/PDFfiles/2002/cdr2502.pdf. Results by individual trust for the second year will be published shortly.

As hospital acquired infections are caused by a variety of micro-organisms and range from the trivial to serious there will not be mandatory reporting for all infections. The national mandatory surveillance scheme was developed on the basis of expert advice and will concentrate on those infections that cause significant serious morbidity such as blood stream infections.

The second phase of the mandatory scheme will be introduced this September, when trusts will have to report blood stream infections due to glycopeptide resistant enterococci and serious untoward incidents associated with infection. Reporting of Clostridium difficile associated diarrhoea will be the third phase and this is scheduled to begin next year.

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of the architecture, physical construction and design of hospitals on preventing the spread of micro-organisms between wards and within wards; and if he will make a statement; [124903]

(2) what research he has recently assessed on the effects of the architecture, physical construction and design of hospitals in preventing the spread of micro-organisms between wards and within wards; and if this research has been published. [124904]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Many factors influence infection control. Current standards already require prevention and control of infection to be considered when planning engineering and building works. The Chief Medical Officer is spearheading a new Government drive to tackle healthcare associated infections; especially those acquired in hospitals. A long-term strategy to prevent and reduce infections in the National Health Service will be published in the autumn.

NHS Estates has funded a number of studies in this area. Those which have been completed are available from the NHS Estates website at www.nhsestates.gov.uk.

Mr. Paul Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nosocomial deaths and *(b)* cases of necrotising fasciitis there were in the NHS in (i) England and (ii) each NHS region in each year since 1997. [125018]

Miss Melanie Johnson: These data are not collected centrally

Hospitals (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to assess the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue requirements of hospitals within Portsmouth; and if he will make a statement; [125975]

(2) what decisions have been taken within the last 12 months to make extra *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue money available to hospitals within Portsmouth; if he will list the (i) projects and (ii) sums of money involved and (iii) start dates; and if he will make a statement. [125976]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The main capital allocations to the national health service were announced on 8 January 2003. Since that date, an additional £240,000 has been allocated to Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust to fund reductions in waiting times for traditionally long-wait specialities. Information on the project timeline is not collected centrally.

We allocate revenue funding to primary care trusts (PCTs) on the basis of the relative needs of their populations. A weighted capitation formula is used to determine each primary care trust's target share of available resources, to enable them to commission similar levels of health services for populations in similar need.

It is for PCTs, in partnership with strategic health authorities and other local stakeholders, to determine how best to use their revenue funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to help ensure that Queen Alexandra hospital, Portsmouth, is able to achieve the status of three-star foundation level within the next four years; and if he will make a statement. [125977]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The National Health Service Performance Ratings announced on 16 July 2003 reflect a significant improvement in performance made by Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust, of which Queen Alexandra hospital is a part. The trust has improved from a zero-star rating to two-stars.

We are committed to raising performance right across the NHS, bringing all NHS trusts up to the standard of the best, and have therefore put in place an NHS Hospital Improvement Programme to ensure that every NHS hospital improves its performance and is able to become a NHS foundation trust. For 2003–04, the Government have made £1 billion of discretionary funding available to strategic health authorities to support performance improvement.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by his Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if he will make a statement. [126193]

Mr. Hutton: All contracts are signed on behalf of the Secretary of State for Health. Contracts signed since 1997 mainly for use within the Department of Health are:

Information Management Services (IMS2); and

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES).

The Infrastructure Management Services contract (IMS2) covers support of the Department of Health's information technology infrastructure, desktop computers, telecommunications and video conferencing facilities and procurement of IT hardware and software. The contract is with the Computer Sciences Corporation. The contract was signed in June 2002 for a period of seven years, and is worth £70 million over the life of the contract.

The Hospital Episode Statistics contract (HES) covers data input, data management, tabulation and extract functions for the hospital episode data collection system. The contract is with Hays Redfern, and was signed in December 2001 for a period of five years. The contract is worth £7 million over the life of the contract.

No renegotiations have taken place, as both contracts have been in existence for less than two years.

Measles and Mumps Vaccines

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the quantity of single *(a)* measles and *(b)* mumps vaccines imported by GPs and private healthcare providers in the last year. [120237]

Miss Melanie Johnson: During the year ending March 2003, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) received notifications to import an average of approximately 10,000 doses of measles vaccine per month and approximately 8,000 doses of mumps vaccine per month. Each notification is an intention to import only and does not necessarily reflect the number of doses actually imported. A survey by the MHRA has indicated that only 34 per cent., and 21 per cent. (for measles vaccine and mumps vaccine respectively) of the doses notified were followed through to importation. It is not known how many of these doses were actually given.

The figures are provided following further examination of the MHRA database of import notifications. This has revealed a serious inaccuracy in the reply provided to the hon. Member on 4 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 903–04W.

The answer stated that the average number of notifications per month received by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) to import all brands of single mumps vaccine during 2002 was 3,014 doses. The answer at that time should have stated that the average number of doses notified per month to the MCA to import all brands of single mumps vaccine was 8,141 doses (for the 10 months ending October 2002).

This discrepancy stems from the method of estimating the number of doses from the number of notifications of intentions to import unlicensed vaccines. Differences between the pack sizes of products, which had previously been assumed to have been the same as the number of doses, were the cause of these discrepancies. After extensive manual examination of records, these figures have now been corrected and systems have been put in place to prevent their recurrence. I apologise to the hon. Member for this inadvertent error.

Medical Assessment Units

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about *(a)* overcrowding, *(b)* inadequate facilities and *(c)* mixed sex accommodation and toilet facilities in medical assessment units; and if he will make a statement. [126188]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have received no representations on any of these matters relating to medical assessment units.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average length of stay in medical assessment units in the NHS in *(a)* England, *(b)* each region and *(c)* each strategic health authority has been in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [126157]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information on length of stay in medical assessment units (MAUs) is not collected centrally.

MAUs have a variety of models of care and therefore it is not appropriate to specify a length of stay. Those which have the role of only initial investigation may have lengths of stay of a few hours. Others may aim to keep patients for up to 48 hours, with the aim of discharging as many patients as possible, up to 40 per cent. in some units, directly to home from the MAU.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is available to the NHS on the provision of senior staff to supervise medical assessment units; what monitoring is undertaken by his Department to ensure that this guidance is adhered to; and if he will make a statement. [126190]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Guidance on the staffing and running of emergency assessment units has recently been issued to the national health service by the Department. The Society of Acute Medicine was consulted, along with other professional bodies, in formulating this guidance. A copy of this can be found on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/emergencycare/emergencyassmentchecklist

The new system of devolved responsibility in the NHS means that strategic health authorities are now responsible for monitoring the performance of the NHS trusts that it manages. This includes ensuring that department issued guidance, such as that for emergency assessment units is adhered to.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* average and *(b)* maximum waiting times for admission to medical assessment units in (i) England and (ii) each strategic health authority in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [126189]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This information is not collected centrally.

National Care Standards Commission

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the budget of the National Care Standards Commission was spent on the inspection of independent boarding schools belonging to the *(a)* Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools and *(b)* Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference in the last year for which figures are available; and what regulations he has set on the regularity of inspections of (i) HMC and IAPS schools and (ii) other private boarding schools. [125176]

Dr. Ladyman: Expenditure by the National Care Standards Commission on the inspection of independent boarding schools belonging to the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools (IAPS) or the Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference (HHC) is not available as this is not currently separately identifiable from other budgetary information.

The frequency of inspections of boarding schools is set out in the National Care Standards Commission (Inspection of Schools and Colleges) Directions 2002. These set out the inspection requirements for boarding schools or colleges as a minimum of one inspection in every period of thirty-six months commencing on

1 April 2002. No distinction is made about frequency of inspection between those schools who are members of IAPS or HMC or those who are not.

National Fruit Scheme

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the maintained nursery schools in *(a)* London and *(b)* the West Midlands so far excluded from the National School Fruit scheme are located in the most deprived (i) 5 per cent., (ii) 10 per cent. and (iii) 25 per cent. of wards according to the Index of Local Deprivation; and what proportion of primary schools so far included in the scheme are located in the most deprived (A) 5 per cent., (B) 10 per cent. and (C) 25 per cent. of wards. [119996]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The figures requested are shown in the table.

	LEA maintained nurseries excluded from the National School Fruit Scheme		*Schools participating in the National School Fruit Scheme*	
	West Midlands	*London*	*West Midlands*	*London*
Total number	75	86	1,744	1,557
Proportion located in most deprived 5 per cent. of wards (%)	24	17	12	7
Proportion located in most deprived 10 per cent. of wards (%)	40	27	20	13
Proportion located in most deprived 25 per cent. of wards (%)	83	51	40	30

Note:
Deprivation is measured according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

NHS Patient Rights

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what rights an NHS patient has to know the professional qualifications of an NHS employee responsible for his care; how a patient can exercise such rights; and if he will make a statement. [125569]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* Patients need to be able to be confident that every person treating them is qualified to do so. This is a requirement of the regulatory bodies, such as the General Medical Council, with whom clinicians have to be registered. If a patient wants specific details, the Code of Practice on Openness in the National Health Service makes it possible for them to receive details of a hospital clinician's qualifications, whilst general practitioners must publish their qualifications in their practice leaflet.

Nosocomial Infections

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the risk of nosocomial infections in medical assessment units; and what guidance has been given to the NHS on this issue. [126156]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No specific guidance on medical assessment units has been issued, but we have set standards to ensure there is a managed environment which minimises the risk of infection to patients, staff and visitors. Analyses of hospital performance in infection control standards has recently shown an improvement and this contributed to the improved star ratings this year.

However, more needs to be done and we are continuing to work to improve infection control in hospitals. The Chief Medical Officer is leading a new initiative to produce a longer term strategy to reduce healthcare associated infections.

Obesity

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 4 July 2003 to the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden), *Official Report*, columns 529–30W, on childhood obesity, how many prescription items of orlistat were dispensed in the community in England in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and how many children received the drug in each of those years. [126345]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The table shows the total number of prescription items of Orlistat that were dispensed in the community in England from 1998 to 2002. In 2002, out of the 541,400 items dispensed in the community in England an estimated 3,000 prescription items, or 0.5 per cent., of the total, of Orlistat were for children. It is estimated that slightly less than 3,000 items of Orlistat were dispensed to children in 2001.

Comparable data for items dispensed to children is not available for earlier years. There is no information available on the number of children who received Orlistat.

Total number of prescription items of Orlistat that were dispensed in the community in England

	Thousand
1998	17.9
1999	127.8
2000	156.3
2001	416.0
2002	541.4

Source:
Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) data from the PPA

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many finished consultant episodes relating to obesity there were in each region in each year since 1997. [126347]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information on the number of finished consultant episodes by region in national health service hospitals for the five years since 1997, where obesity is the primary diagnosis, is shown in the table.

Region	1997–1998	1998–1999	1999–2000	2000–2001	2001–2002
Northern and Yorkshire	237	287	352	379	377
Trent	117	144	147	151	95
Anglia and Oxford (Eastern)	40	64	35	46	51
North Thames (London	136	141	221	287	229
South Thames (South East)	68	86	83	54	88
South West	77	115	53	58	75
West Midlands	43	91	51	57	58
North West	92	146	144	171	175
Total	810	1,074	1,086	1,203	1,148

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health, England.

Older People

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 10 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 1013–14W, on older people, if he will place in the Library a copy of the information collated through strategic health authorities concerning the national service framework. [126636]

Dr. Ladyman: The reports provided to strategic health authorities (SHAs) by local national health service bodies and councils giving information on the implementation of the single assessment process for older people have been analysed, and issues addressed, at the SHA level. Individual reports were made available to the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) where appropriate. A number of overview reports compiled by SHAs on the localities reporting to them have been copied to the Department of Health for information. Intelligence from these overview reports, allied to discussion with SHA and SSI officials, has helped the Department understand where progress has been made and the challenges lie. As a result a brief working summary of key issues was tabled at the implementation conferences held by the Department in January and February 2003. There are no plans to publish this summary more widely. The Department plans to publish a more formal report on the single assessment process, based on issues arising from the overview reports from 2002, the equivalent reports from 2003 and other intelligence later this year.

In March 2003, the Department published a report of progress on all aspects of the national service framework for older people, including the single assessment process. The report was titled "National Service Framework for Older People—a report of progress and future challenges, 2003". A copy is available in the Library.

Overseas Medical Treatment

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the standard waiting period is before being able to use NHS funds to seek medical treatment abroad. [123603]

Mr. Hutton: The time a patient waits for treatment under the national health service, whether provided at home or abroad, depends on number of factors including their clinical need and local circumstances. Policy on waiting times in England is set out in the NHS Plan.

Overseas Patients

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what income the NHS has received from payments from overseas patients that are not eligible for free treatment for each of the years since 1997. [126012]

Mr. Hutton: National health service trust accounts do not identify separately income generated from treatment of chargeable overseas visitors.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of overseas patients who have received free medical treatment for which they have not been eligible in each of the last five years. [126015]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service is first and foremost for the benefit of people who live in the United Kingdom.

A person who is not ordinarily resident in the UK, but who requires NHS hospital treatment, is subject to the provisions of the provisions of the National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations 1989, as amended.

NHS trusts will take all reasonable measures to recover charges made to overseas visitors. Overseas visitors debt that is unrecoverable is written off and recorded in trust annual accounts. The overseas visitors bad debt written off for the last five years is shown in the table.

	Amount written off (£)
1997–98	1.1 million
1998–99	854,000
1999–2000	1.2 million
2000–01	1.8 million
2001–02	1.3 million

Pain Relief

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* whole time equivalent posts and *(b)* vacancies for (i) consultants, (ii) specialist registrars, (iii) senior house officers, (iv) nurses and (v) professions allied to medicines, specialising in pain relief there were in each year since 1997. [126349]

Mr. Hutton: Information is not available on the number of posts or vacancies for staff specialising in pain relief. Pain relief is a sub-specialty of anaesthetics. Information on whole-time equivalent staff in post for consultants, registrars and senior house officers in

anaesthetics is shown in the table. Information on the number of whole-time equivalent posts in national health service trusts is not collected centrally.

Information on vacancies lasting three months or more is collected in the NHS vacancy survey which has been collected in March each year since 1999. Information specifically for the anaesthetics (inc. intensive care) specialty has only been collected since 2000. There is no comparable information on nurses or allied health professionals.

Between 1997 and 2002, the number of whole-time equivalent consultants working in anaesthetics (inc. intensive care) have increased by 40 per cent., registrars by 10 per cent., and senior house officers by 14 per cent.

Hospital medical staff within the anaesthetics (inc. intensive care) specialty—England at 30 September 2002

Whole time equivalents

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Consultant	2,658.7	2,840.4	3,052.7	3,172.9	3,361.4	3,712.2
Registrar Group	1,547.4	1,583.7	1,578.3	1,605.8	1,636.8	1,706.1
Senior House Officer	1,307.4	1,267.7	1,230.5	1,282.8	1,369.2	1,488.7

Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

Department of Health Vacancies Survey—Vacancies in NHS trusts for consultants in anaesthetics (inc. intensive care) three month vacancy rates[1,2] and numbers[3] for total of each group

	Numbers	*Rates (percentage)*
2001	60	1.7
2002	80	2.2

[1] Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March each year which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).
[2] Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the medical and dental workforce census (whole time equivalent).
[3] Numbers are rounded to the nearest 10.
Notes:
1. Percentages rounded to one decimal place.
2. England totals include staff from Special Health Authorities.
Source:
Department of Health Vacancies Survey 2001.

Papilloma Virus

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the results of the three human papilloma virus implementation pilots now being undertaken; and what progress is being made in the HPV primary screening trial being undertaken in Manchester. [123247]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The pilot of human papilloma virus (HPV) testing for women with mild or borderline cervical screening test results, along with liquid based cytology, began in April 2001 at three sites: Bristol, Newcastle, and Norfolk and Norwich. The independent evaluation report of the HPV arm of the pilot is due to be sent to the Department of Health at the end of September 2003, and will then undergo a peer review process. Implications of the report for the National Health Service Cervical Screening Programme will be discussed by the United Kingdom National Screening Committee, who originally commissioned the pilot. Publication is expected in early 2004.

The ARTISTIC trial (A randomised trial of human papilloma virus testing in primary cervical screening), which is led by Professor Henry Kitchener at Manchester University, is broadly on target to complete patient recruitment by the end of 2003. The main results will not be known until 2007–08, as it will take two years to reach the necessary number of patients and each patient then needs to be followed up for three years in order to evaluate the sensitivity and accuracy of the test.

Pathology Laboratories

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his plans are for the future inspection of pathology laboratories. [123753]

Mr. Hutton: Currently, registration for accreditation of pathology laboratories in the United Kingdom is voluntary, except for cervical cytology laboratories. To improve clinical governance, raise quality standards and improve openness and transparency for patients, we believe that the current voluntary system for laboratory accreditation is no longer acceptable. We have, therefore, decided that all National Health Service pathology laboratories in England should enrol with an appropriate accreditation scheme. Further information will be contained in theDepartment of Health document on modernising pathology services, which will be published shortly.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 10 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 1041–12W, on the Patient Advocacy and Liaison Service, what the methodology was for the recent mapping exercise. [126342]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department of Health undertook a survey of all national health service trusts and primary care trusts to ascertain the provision of patient advice and liaison services (PALS) in England. The survey included a question on whether each NHS trust had a PALS. The survey was carried out through the strategic health authorities and a listing of the trusts reporting that they have an active PALS can be found on the Department's website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/patientadviceandliaisonservices/.

Plastic Surgery

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the records which he holds of the number of plastic surgery procedures broken down by category carried out in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [125738]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is committed to improving patient access to plastic surgery, and the quality of care they receive. For these reasons the Modernisation Agency has established the 'Action on Plastic Surgery' programme. This will develop good practice and spread it throughout the national health service.

We have also increased the number of consultant plastic surgeons. At September 2002, there were 203 plastic surgeons, which is an increase of 31 per cent. since 1997. The Department is also supporting further expansion by increasing training places.

Figures for Finished Consultant Episodes broken down by a number of plastic surgical procedures carried out in the NHS for years 1992–93 to 2000–01, have been placed in the Library. Figures have been adjusted for coverage and missing/invalid clinical data. Comparable data prior to 1992–93 are not available, and data for 2001–02 are not yet available.

Professions Allied to Medicine

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* occupational therapists, *(b)* speech and language therapists and *(c)* physiotherapists (i) began and (ii) finished training in each year since 1997. [126532]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and physiotherapists entering training each year since 1997 is shown in the table.

Since 1996–97, the number of training places for occupational therapists have been increased by 77 per cent., physiotherapists have increased by 97 per cent., and, since 1998–99, the number of speech and language therapist training places have been increased by 31 per cent.

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Occupational therapists	958	1,107	1,135	1,173	1,385	1,563	1,692
Speech and language therapists[1]	74	75	455	457	558	553	597
Physiotherapists	1,093	1,204	1,344	1,346	1,473	1,780	2,157

[1] Prior to 1998–99, funding for speech and language therapist training was funded by DfES.

Information on the number of students completing training is not collected centrally. The Health Professions Council holds information on the numbers of occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech and language therapists on their register, a prerequisite for employment in the United Kingdom. This information can be found at http://www.hpc-uk.orq/aboutus/facts_figures_cpsm_reqistrants.htm.

Prostate Cancer

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of links between high-dose zinc supplements and prostate cancer in men. [126091]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* The Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals recently considered the safety of zinc, along with other vitamins and minerals. It found no evidence of an association between zinc and prostate cancer.

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the efficacy of using glycyrrhizin in treating severe acute respiratory syndrome. [122391]

Miss Melanie Johnson: As the United Kingdom has no active cases of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), it is not feasible for the UK to undertake an assessment of the efficacy of glycyrrhizin in treating SARS.

Sexual Health

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has developed a model to assess the impact of waiting times on sexual health outcomes; and if he will make a statement. [122740]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department of Health, the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales are funding the Medical Research Council (MRC) to develop a programme of research to contribute to the evidence base for the Sexual Health and HIV Strategy. Through this programme we are supporting research being undertaken by a team from University College London to explore the effects of delayed access to treatment on the transmission dynamics of gonorrhoea, chlamydia and non-specific urethritis. A model will be developed which will quantify the impact of delayed access to services, failed partner notification, and flow to primary care on transmission dynamics. This research, funded by the MRC, will provide us with better evidence of effective interventions to reduce transmission of infection through improved access to services.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the outcome was of the audit of genito-urinary medicine waiting times; and if he will make a statement. [122741]

Miss Melanie Johnson: An audit undertaken by professional bodies in 2002 shows that the median time to first appointment in genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinics was 12 days for men and 14 days for women. Accurate data on GUM waiting times is not currently collected centrally and we are therefore funding the Health Protection Agency to roll-out the collection of patient specific data. This is in conjunction with the development of a minimum data set for GUM, which will enable an accurate calculation of waiting times to be made for both individual patients and primary care trusts.

We are also working with representatives of professional bodies to develop a service review process for GUM. This will involve a multi-disciplinary team visiting each clinic to review data, staffing and working practices including auditing waiting times.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether additional resources are being invested to improve genito-urinary medicine services in the current financial year; and if he will make a statement. [122742]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department of Health has invested a further £8 million in genito-urinary medicine services this year to reduce waiting times and improve capacity. This funding is recurring and is additional to the £5 million we invested last year. Allocations have been made to clinics based on their workload. In addition, we have a further £2 million to

invest in around 20 development schemes to pump-prime the establishment of new services or further develop those already in existence. We will be shortly seeking bids from primary care trusts that meet specific criteria.

Sporting Injuries (Children)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were admitted to the Royal Shrewsbury hospital last year with sporting injuries, broken down by sporting type. [126640]

Dr. Ladyman: This information is not collected centrally.

Stroke Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of stroke patients were under 18 in each year since 1997. [126527]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is shown in the table.

Finished Consultant Episodes: Count of in year admissions for primary diagnosis stroke (160–164 ICD 10) by age in NHS hospitals in England 1997–98 to 2001–02

Year	*Under 18*	*18 and over*	*All ages*	*Percentage of under 18*
1997–98	346	84,650	84,996	0.41
1998–99	342	87,986	88,328	0.39
1999–2000	340	86,742	87,082	0.39
2000–01	311	82,400	82,711	0.38
2001–02	297	83,347	83,644	0.36

Notes:
1. Figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.
2. The primary diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.
3. An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider.
4. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of stroke patients were treated in a specialist unit in each strategic health authority, in each year since 1997; [126528]

(2) how many stroke patients did not receive a swallowing assessment within 24 hours of admission to hospital within the last year; and if he will make a statement; [126534]

(3) what the *(a)* average and *(b)* maximum waiting times for stroke assessment after arrival at hospital were in each region in each year since 1997; [126535]

(4) how many and what percentage of general hospitals have had a specialist stroke unit in each year since 1997. [126542]

Dr. Ladyman: We do not collect routinely information on stroke services at the level of detail requested in these questions. The most comprehensive source of information is the National Sentinel Stroke Audit, carried out by the Royal College of Physicians. The audit was commissioned by the national health service in 1998 and was last updated in 2002. The results can be found at http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/pubs/strokeaudit01–02.pdf. The audit contains information covering discharge arrangements, and clinical assessments including swallowing assessments. The 2002 audit shows that 73 per cent. of trusts who participated had a stroke unit, compared to 56 per cent. three years earlier. In addition, 83 per cent. of patients receive brain imaging—the highest ever level. The audit shows that 80 per cent., of trusts that participated have a consultant physician with specialist knowledge of stroke who is formally recognised as having principal responsibility for stroke services. While it is recognised that some services need to increase their capacity, the audit notes that very significant improvements have already been made.

Our major vehicle for further improving standards for stroke services is through the older people's national service framework (NSF), which sets specific milestones for improvement by 2004 of stroke services in primary care trusts, specialist services and general hospitals that care for people suffering from a stroke. Our document, "Improvement, Expansion and Reform", which sets for the national health service a Priorities and Planning Framework for 2003–06, makes clear that implementation of the older people's NSF is a top priority and that the 2004 milestone around specialist stroke services is a key target.

We monitor progress against the key milestones in the NSF. From the information gathered so far we know that 83 per cent., of the hospitals which have replied now have plans to have a specialist stroke service in place by April 2004.

Implementation of the NSF for older people is leading to real improvements in stroke services and making a difference to people's lives. The development of better services and improved standards in stroke care requires the right balance between national standards, provided by the NSF, national clinical guidelines and local control. It will be important to ensure that stroke care services are co-ordinated and fully integrated within a full range of other relevant local services.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many stroke physicians there are in hospital trusts; and if he will make a statement. [126529]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect data on stroke physicians; a number of specialties are linked with the treatment of patients with strokes.

The main specialties are geriatric medicine, neurology and rehabilitation medicine but it is not possible to say how many of the physicians within these specialties specialise in the treatment of strokes.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the cost of strokes to the NHS in each of the last five years. [126533]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not collected centrally. Health authorities and primary care trusts receive unified allocations to cover the costs of hospital and community health services, discretionary funding for general practice staff, premises and computers and primary care prescribing.

The level of funding made available for the drugs, staffing and other costs of providing stroke services are determined locally. It is for health authorities in partnership with primary care groups/trusts and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to provide health services for their populations including those with stroke.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what monitoring is in place to ensure that NHS trusts have reviewed hospital services for stroke using the clinical audit methodology developed by the Royal College of Physicians; [126538]

(2) what monitoring is in place to ensure that NHS trusts have agreed local priorities for action required to establish an integrated stroke service which is regularly audited with a continuing cycle of improvement; [126539]

(3) whether every hospital which cares for older people with stroke has established clinical audit systems to ensure delivery of the Royal College of Physicians clinical guidelines for stroke care. [126540]

Dr. Ladyman: In 2001, the Third National Sentinel Audit of Stroke, carried out by the Clinical Effectiveness and Evaluation Unit of the Royal College of Physicians and led by the Intercollegiate Working Party for Stroke, gave a detailed picture of the way hospitals provide care for stroke patients. The results of this study were published July 2002.

In the 2001 audit, 98 per cent. of eligible acute trusts submitted clinical data, demonstrating delivery of the clinical guidelines. The next National Sentinel Audit of Stroke is expected to take place in April 2004.

The Department of Health will be monitoring formally the overall stroke milestone in April 2004 as this is included as one of the key targets in "Improvement, Expansion and Reform", the priorities and planning framework for 2003–06. It is now for strategic health authorities to plan, deliver and monitor progress locally on the other stroke milestones in the national service framework.

Progress on this key target will be monitored through the 2003–04 local delivery plan reporting mechanism and information will be available later in the year.

Sunbeds

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the operation of tanning salons following health education authority guidelines which recommend that nobody under the age of 16 should be allowed to use a sunbed; [120086]

(2) what assessment he has made of the potential risks to children under the age of 16 of skin cancer from using sunbeds; and if he will make a statement; [120087]

(3) what plans he has to ensure that sunbed salons are regulated to stop children from using salons in a harmful manner; and if he will make a statement. [120088]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government acknowledge the risks to young people of exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR) in all of its forms. On sunbeds specifically, the Health and Safety Executive has published guidance for operators and customers of solaria. The advice for people under 16-years-old is that they should not use sunbeds.

There is no conclusive direct evidence that sunbed exposure causes skin cancer from either of the recent reports on the effects of UVR from the National Radiological Protection Board's and from the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection.

However, by far the greatest source of UVR exposure is from the sun. That is why we have taken measures to ensure that parents are encouraged to protect their children. We have, with key stakeholders, developed the SunSmart campaign, run by Cancer Research UK. The campaign was launched in March and funded by the United Kingdom Health Departments. Campaign leaflets and posters have been sent to all general practitioner surgeries, secondary schools and health promotion units. Officials will discuss with Cancer Research UK the possibility of developing a new element to their campaign warning young people of the dangers of using sunbeds.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many planning applications have been made to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department. [124808]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Since 2001, when the current planning regulations on mobile telecommunications masts came into force, there have been no planning applications or applications for prior approval to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department.

Toothpaste

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of toothpaste sold in the UK contained fluoride in the last 12 months. [125194]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department does not collect this information.

Tranquillisers/Anti-depressants

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations the UK has made to the European Medicines Evaluation Agency's review of anti-depressant drugs; [125636]

(2) what steps the UK's representatives to the European Medicines Evaluation Agency's review of anti-depressants have taken to represent the views of pharmaceutical companies; [125637]

(3) what his policy is on representatives of drug companies sitting on public bodies which determine and review the safety of drugs for prescription to the public; [125638]

(4) what representations he has received on the UK members of the European Medicines Evaluation Agency; and whether he was consulted on their appointment. [125639]

Miss Melanie Johnson: On 12 June 2003, the United Kingdom referred the risks and benefits of the antidepressant Seroxat (paroxetine) to the European scientific committee, the Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products (CPMP) for a Europe-wide evaluation. There are two UK representatives to the CPMP, who are appointed by Ministers, chosen by reason of their role and experience in the evaluation of medicinal products to represent the UK Licensing Authority.

The Medicines Act 1968 requires one of its advisory bodies, the Medicines Commission, to have at least one member with "wide and recent experience of, and shown capacity in" the pharmaceutical industry. There are currently two serving members of the Medicines Commission who are employees of pharmaceutical companies. Advisory bodies do not make determinations on drug safety issues but rather advise the Licensing Authority which may, or may not, accept their advice.

All members of the Medicines Act Advisory committees are required to follow a code of practice relating to declarations of interests in the pharmaceutical industry. The code is rigorously followed at each meeting to ensure the integrity of the advice given to the Licensing Authority by those committees.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of *(a)* tuberculosis and *(b)* drug resistant tuberculosis there have been in England in each year since 1997; and how many deaths resulted. [124799]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Notifications of tuberculosis (TB) and multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR TB) are made to the Health Protection Agency.

The total numbers of TB and MDR TB cases and deaths are shown in the table.

	Number of cases	*MDR (%)*	*Isoniazid resistant (%)*	*Deaths*[1]
1997	5,664	1.4	5.6	385
1998	5,915	1.4	6.3	392
1999	5,938	0.8	6.1	383
2000	6,379	1.1	6.5	370
2001	6,571	N/A	N/A	375
2002	[2]6,627	N/A	N/A	N/A

[1] England and Wales figure (ONS data).
[2] Provisional figure.

Waiting Lists/Times

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken with respect to the discovery in March that chief executives of some hospitals had altered waiting list figures. [123601]

Mr. Hutton: The Department asked the Audit Commission to carry out a series of spot checks to further improve data quality and to reassure the public that published waiting times statistics remain robust.

The Department asked all trusts subject to spot checks to report back on the auditor's findings and to confirm that action had been taken to address those findings. In the three trusts identified by the Audit Commission as deliberately misreporting prompt action was taken. This action involved commissioning independent external reviews and taking appropriate disciplinary action taken, which is still ongoing.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 9 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 334W, on waiting times, whether anyone waited for more than 24 months for cancer treatment. [118301]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The figures for people waiting over 24 months for heart operations, hip replacements and cancer treatment, which appeared on 9 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 334W, were incorrectly printed. The *Official Report* has been notified of the error, which will be corrected in the Bound Volume.

The correct figures are shown in the table.

	Waiting more than 24 months
Heart operations	0
Hip replacements	9
Cancer treatment (Neoplasms)	8

Social Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the update of the Wanless report announced in the Budget will include a full examination of the long-term trends in social care, as recommended by the original Wanless report. [109238]

Dr. John Reid: The update of the Wanless report announced in the Budget will not include a full examination of long-term trends in social care.

Welfare Food Scheme

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the impact of the changes to the Welfare Food Scheme on *(a)* disadvantaged parents and *(b)* other client groups. [126177]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The proposed changes to the Welfare Food Scheme were consulted upon in October 2002. The consultation exercise included specific focus groups with beneficiaries of the scheme.

A summary report on the outcome of the consultation, which demonstrated strong support for reforming the scheme, was published in March 2003. Both documents are available in the Library.

Working Time Directive

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the implementation of the working time directive on junior hospital doctors. [124430]

Mr. Hutton: Implementation of the European Working Time Directive (WTD) requires the hours of work of doctors in training to reduce to 58 hours from August 2004 and to 48 hours by 2009 or 2012 with an extension. While the number of doctors on an individual rota on call will generally have to increase to implement the 2004 requirements, the intention of the

Department's guidance—HSC 2003/001 Protecting Staff, Delivering Services—Implementing the European Working Time Directive for Doctors in Training is that Trusts should find ways to reduce the number of resident rotas. It is important to change working practices so that additional staff are used in a way, which not only delivers WTD compliance but also the extra service activity to meet NHS Plan targets. For instance, other staff will need to take on some of the work traditionally undertaken by doctors in training. Using this approach, trusts can plan to meet the WTD within the substantial expansion in staff numbers currently being implemented.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Department since 29 October 2002. [126618]

Ms. Rosie Winterton: The Department of Health made 51 written ministerial statements between 29 October 2002 and 15 July 2003.

Written Answers to Questions

The following answers were received between Friday 18 July and Monday 1 September 2003

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Carer's Allowance

Mr. Siôn Simon: To ask the Minister for Women what entitlements are available to women who act as carers who have been receiving Carer's Allowance, once they have become entitled to state pension. [126105]

Ms Hewitt: Women entitled to both Carer's Allowance and State Pension receive the latter because the social security overlapping benefits rules give precedence to payment of State Pension, which is a contributory benefit, over payment of a non-contributory benefit such as Carer's Allowance. If the weekly amount of State Pension paid is less than the weekly rate of Carer's Allowance, the amount by which the Carer's Allowance exceeds State Pension is also paid. In addition, such carers may also be entitled to the carer premium if they are in receipt of an income related benefit, to a State Second Pension, other social security benefits depending on their circumstances, and the Christmas Bonus and Winter Fuel Payments.

Civil Service Pay

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for Women when the pay reviews of civil service departments and agencies will be published; and if she will place a copy in the Library. [125737]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

Departments and agencies are responsible for undertaking their own equal pay review and producing an action plan. It is for individual departments to determine whether they will place a copy in the Library.

The Cabinet Office is considering the actions contained in departmental action plans and will be publishing a summary of the findings after the summer recess.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Attorney-General Reference Cases

Keith Vaz: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on her practice in appointing trial counsel in Attorney-General reference cases. [125995]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service instructs counsel on behalf of the Attorney-General in Attorney-General reference cases. These are cases that are referred to the Court of Appeal under section 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1972 and sections 35 and 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 either on a point of law or because they come within the unduly lenient sentence provisions, under which the Attorney-General refers a case to the Court of Appeal to have the sentence reviewed on the grounds that it is unduly lenient.

The Crown Prosecution Service usually instructs Senior Treasury Counsel or Junior Treasury Counsel to undertake this work. Treasury Counsel are very experienced counsel, used by the Crown for serious work. When instructing counsel, the Crown Prosecution Service considers the seniority of counsel, the specialist areas of work in which counsel practises and the ability of counsel to return work at the specified time. In deciding which counsel to instruct, the Crown Prosecution Service strives to promote consistency in the decision-making process.

In cases concerning potentially unduly lenient sentences it is considered to be of particular benefit to have new counsel to consider the facts. Consistency in these applications is maintained by restricting them to Treasury Counsel, who build up expertise in this field of work.

Crown Prosecution Service

Keith Vaz: To ask the Solicitor-General how many lawyers left the Crown Prosecution Service in 2002. [125782]

The Solicitor-General: During 2002, 83 lawyers (i.e. 3.56 per cent. of the average legal staff in post) ceased working for the Crown Prosecution Service. Of those, 27 were early retirements, 22 were resignations, eight were standard retirements, 11 were dismissals, nine were transfers to other Government Departments, four were early severance and two were deaths.

Within the same period, and as part of the Government's commitment in the White Paper, "Criminal Justice—The Way Ahead", 251 lawyers (i.e 10.76 per cent. of the average legal staff in post) joined the Service.

Guantanamo Bay

Llew Smith: To ask the Solicitor-General what information the Attorney-General has *(a)* requested and *(b)* received from (i) the United States Secretary for Defense and (ii) the US Attorney General in respect of the legal rights and legal representation to be afforded to detainees held at camp X-ray in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba by the United States Administration. [126318]

The Solicitor-General: *(a)* The Attorney-General has raised the position of the UK nationals detained in Guantanamo Bay with the United States Department of Defense, which has responsibility for this matter, to express the Government's profound concern that if the UK detainees are to be tried they should have a fair trial with all proper safeguards, including legal representation, and to make plain the Government's opposition to the imposition of the death penalty.

During a meeting with the then US Assistant Attorney General in September 2002, the Attorney-General raised the Government's concern about the position of the UK nationals detained in Guantanamo

Bay. The Attorney-General has had no discussions about the Guantanamo Bay detainees with the US Attorney General.

(b) The Department of Defense has responded to the Attorney-General that detainees in Guantanamo Bay are held as enemy combatants under the laws of armed conflict and as such are not entitled to legal representation. They explained that their view is that the procedures of the military commissions established to try individuals designated under the US President's Military Order of 13 November 2001 provide for detainees to have access to defence counsel if the individual has been charged with an offence. They have also stated that they believe that the military commissions constitute an impartial and regularly constituted court respecting generally recognised principles of regular judicial procedure.

However, the Attorney-General continues to have serious concerns about these issues, and is in Washington on 21 and 22 July to discuss the matter further with senior members of the US Administration.

Illegal Trading Prosecutions

Mr. Watts: To ask the Solicitor-General how many individuals have been successfully prosecuted for illegal trading in the last three years. [125208]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) among others prosecute offences of companies that continue to trade while insolvent.

The Serious Fraud Office has prosecuted one defendant in the last three years for an offence under section 458 of the Companies Act 1985.

The CPS's centrally held records do not include offence-based information about the cases that it prosecutes. It is therefore not possible to say, without incurring disproportionate cost, how many individuals have been prosecuted for such offences over the last three years.

The CPS is currently rolling out a new Compass Case Management System that will capture offence-based information from across the Service's 42 Areas.

Incitement to Crime

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Solicitor-General how many *(a)* indictments and *(b)* convictions there have been in each of the last five years for the offence of incitement to commit a crime; and in what proportion of such (i) indictments and (ii) convictions incitement to commit a crime was the only charge. [126185]

Paul Goggins: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available centrally. The figures collected by the Home Office on persons proceeded against and convicted do not separately identify the offence of incitement to commit a crime.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Solicitor-General how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by her Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if she will make a statement. [126210]

The Solicitor-General: The information requested is as follows.

Crown Prosecution Service

The Compass contract was awarded to LogicaCMG (formerly Logica UK Limited) on 31 December 2001 under a Private Finance Initiative procurement to provide a fully managed IT service to the Crown Prosecution Service. The Compass contract is for 10 years with the option of extending it for a further 5 years. Over 10 years the cost is currently estimated to be £275 million. This is subject to change as user numbers change and/or additional facilities are required. There has been no renegotiation of the contract.

Serious Fraud Office and Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers

There is one material contract relating to "Outsourced IT contracts" for the provision of IT support services. This contract is with IBM and originated as a comprehensive, PFI outsourcing in 1998. It was re-negotiated at end 2000 as a fixed-price, support agreement, subject to an inflation-related annual increase. The value of the agreement is affected by privity of contract but it has been considered to offer sufficient value for money that it was subsequently extended to provide support for the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers. IBM charges the Serious Fraud Office for this extension and the Serious Fraud Office recharges to the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers. Prior to 1998 IT was supported in-house both at the Serious Fraud Office and the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers.

HM Crown Prosecution Service

Since its inception in October 2000, HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has relied on the Crown Prosecution Service for the provision of its IT services. However, it used separate one-off contracts with commercial suppliers for the initial design and continuous improvement of its website. In 2002 this contract work totalled £5,000.

The design of the website is such that the majority of maintenance work can be conducted in-house. Any specific improvements, or work beyond the in-house capability would be subject to the awarding of separate contracts.

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has budgeted for a maximum cost per annum of £5,000 for both this work and the hosting of the website.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

Since 1997, the Treasury Solicitor's Department has entered into no contracts where an external organisation delivers and operates IT service on the Department's behalf. The Department's in-house Information Services team provides the IT services for the Department, generally using commercially available software, supported by contractors where necessary.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Solicitor-General when she expects to answer the question of 24 February from the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire on IT contracts in the Department above £50 million. [126904]

The Solicitor-General: No such question was asked.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Law Officers' Departments since 29 October 2002. [126604]

The Solicitor-General: I have made six written ministerial statements since 29 October 2002 on behalf of the Law Officers' Departments.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

National Land Information System

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 19 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 653W, on the National Land Information System, what steps the Government have taken in the past 12 months to encourage local authorities to transfer their land and property information to electronic local land and property gazetteers to link into the National Land Information System. [126638]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is responsible for the Local e-Government programme, which is supporting the electronic enablement of the local authority services in England, including the development of an electronic National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG).

The Government have encouraged the recording of land and property information, as a means of providing both an improved service to customers making land charge searches, and an improved, consistent database for the authority's own use. In particular, on 24 July 2002, the Lord Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), the leader of the Welsh Assembly and the Chairman of the Local Government Association and the Welsh Local Government Association jointly wrote to all local authority Chief Executives in England and Wales, pointing out the benefits of the NLPG, and of the one-stop shop for land and property related information provided by the National Land Information Services (NLIS). The benefits include saving staff time otherwise wasted on maintaining duplicate address lists, and improved service delivery based on accurate, up to date address data. My hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the then Parliamentary Secretary for the Lord Chancellor's Department and my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie), followed up the letter by hosting a reception on 8 October 2002 for local authorities which had committed to NLIS.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister also asked every authority in England to prepare and submit an implementing e-Government (IEG) statement in 2001 and 2002, in return for which they would receive £200,000 to help implement the e-Government plan set out in it. Authorities were asked to include some key data in their statements, including indicating whether they were committed to NLPG and NLIS. Following assessment of the IEGs submitted in 2002, Ministers of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister sought (with the agreement of the Local Government Association and other stakeholders) parliamentary approval for the use of £2.2 million from the Local e-Government programme funds to ensure that all local authorities were committed to supporting the NLPG by December 2003. Specifically, this will fund work to identify the barriers to implementation of the NLPG. Where implemented the NLPG will provide basis for electronic land and property information searches by NLIS and other compatible services. It will remain a decision for local authorities as to whether or not to link to NLIS.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he will take to enforce Regional Planning Guidance targets for affordable housing provision in the south-west. [126338]

Keith Hill: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), *Official Report*, column 1152W, on 13 June 2003, to a similar question, which made it clear that targets for affordable housing are set out in local development plans based on local assessments housing needs surveys undertaken by local planning authorities. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will continue fully to support policies and proposals by local authorities that are soundly based on such assessments. This process will also be aided by the more strategic and coherent approach to housing issues provided by the new South West Regional Housing Board established in February by the Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he will take to assist key workers in the south-west to meet their housing needs at a reasonable price. [126339]

Keith Hill: As at 30 June 2003, more than 160 key workers in the south-west region had been helped to purchase their own homes under the Starter Home Initiative. From 2004–05, funding for the provision of key worker housing will be integrated into the Housing Corporation's main affordable housing programme. Funding for new key worker housing schemes in the south-west will be informed by advice from the South West Regional Housing Board.

On 29 May the South West Regional Housing Body published a draft document setting out priorities for public sector housing investment in the south-west region. It contained a proposal to allocate funding for key worker housing in the region as part of its overall housing strategy. Ministers will be considering this together with other regional housing strategies that are due to be submitted this month.

Arson

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the schools in Herefordshire and Worcestershire that have been subject to arson attack since 1997. [126728]

Phil Hope: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* Hereford and Worcester fire brigade and *(b)* West Mercia police force regarding ways to tackle arson attacks on schools in the Herefordshire and Worcestershire area. [126729]

Phil Hope: The Deputy Prime Minister has not had recent discussions with the Hereford and Worcester fire brigade or the West Mercia police force on this matter.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is awarding £50,000 this financial year, via the Arson Control Forum, to the West Mercia Local Arson Task Force. The task force includes members from the Hereford and Worcester fire brigade and West Mercia constabulary; its plans for reducing arson in schools this year include holding arson reduction and information sessions for governors and staff of schools perceived to be at highest risk of arson.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what the clear up rate of malicious fires was in each police force area, in each year since 1997; [125530]

(2) what the arson detection rate was in each year since 1997. [125531]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The available information from police recorded crime data on detection rates for arson and all recorded crime in England and Wales for the years since 1997 are as follows:

Percentage detection rates—England and Wales

	Arson	*All recorded crime*
1997[1]	16	28
1998–99[2]	10	29
1999–2000[3]	9	25
2000–01	8	24
2001–02[4]	8	23

[1] Calendar year, and years ending March thereafter
[2] There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which may have affected detection rates.
[3] There was a change in the counting rules for detections on 1 April 1999, which will have had an effect on detection rates.
[4] Detection rates may have been affected by some police forces adopting the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard in advance of its national implementation on 1 April 2002.

Corporate Governance

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of the *(a)* press release released by the Audit Commission on the publication of the Corporate Governance inspection of Kingston upon Hull and *(b)* records of questions and answers at the accompanying press conference. [125664]

Mr. Raynsford: I will ask the Audit Commission to provide a copy of their press release to the Library of the House. The Audit Commission has informed this Office of the Deputy Prime Minister that in general, they do not record questions and answers raised in their press conferences—hence this cannot be made available for the Library of the House.

Council Housing (North-East Lincolnshire)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions he has had with North-East Lincolnshire council about the adequacy of the provision he has made for repairs and renovations of council housing; what recommendations he has made to them about the benefits of a large scale voluntary transfer, broken down by housing association; and what proposals he has for visiting North-East Lincolnshire to commend the large scale voluntary transfer to council tenants. [126560]

Keith Hill: The Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber and the Community Housing Task Force have held a number of discussions with the council about their plans for delivering decent homes. The council has benefited from an increase in resources for housing investment from £2.221 million for 1997–98 to £6.563 million for 2003–04, including provision for major repairs allowance that was introduced in 2001–02. This demonstrates the Government's commitment to providing resources to tackle the backlog of council house renovation work and to modernise older stock to a standard of decency that tenants have a right to expect.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to visit North-East Lincolnshire and has made no recommendations to North-East Lincolnshire about large scale voluntary transfer in particular, although all authorities are required to have in place arrangements to ensure the delivery of the decent homes target by December 2010. Housing transfer is one of three options available to an authority where additional resources are required to meet this target.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much has been *(a)* claimed by and *(b)* paid to (i) North East Lincolnshire, (ii) North Lincolnshire, (iii) Hull and (iv) the East Riding in major repairs allowances for council housing in the last 12 months. [126418]

Keith Hill: The following major repairs allowances for 2002–03 have been claimed and included in the calculation of entitlement to housing revenue account subsidy:

	£
North East Lincolnshire	4,837,178
North Lincolnshire	5,685,966
Kingston upon Hull	16,181,820
East Riding of Yorkshire	6,240,493

Council Tax

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list by each council tax valuation band the estimated number of households liable to pay council tax for 2003–04 in *(a)* England and *(b)* each of the English regions. [127211]

Phil Hope: The number of chargeable dwellings for 2003–04 for England, and for each Government Office region, broken down by council tax band, is in the table.

Thousands

Valuation band ranges (1991)	Band A Under £40,000	Band B £40,001 to £52,000	Band C £52,001 to £68,000	Band D £68,001 to £88,000	Band E £88,001 to £120,000	Band F £120,001 to £160,000	Band G £160,001 to £320,000	Band H Over £320,000	Total all bands
Ratio to Band D	6/9	7/9	8/9	1	11/9	13/9	15/9	2	
England	5,293	4,012	4,516	3,151	1,976	1,044	749	114	20,855
North-east	638	154	155	80	40	18	10	1	1,097
North-west	1,260	549	505	283	167	82	56	5	2,907
Yorkshire and Humber	956	410	344	186	119	57	34	3	2,107
East midlands	677	396	316	184	109	52	31	3	1,767
West midlands	697	547	420	236	149	81	49	5	2,185
East of England	322	481	605	397	241	132	90	10	2,278
London	102	410	813	779	470	233	190	51	3,048
South-east	280	543	861	669	453	274	221	29	3,329
South-west	361	523	496	338	229	116	69	6	2,138

Source:
CTB1 2003–04

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list by each council tax valuation band the average council tax payable for 2003–04 in each of the English regions. [127578]

Phil Hope: The average council tax payable for 2003–04 and for each Government Office Region, broken down by council tax band, is shown in the following table:

£

Valuation band ranges (1991)	Band A Under £40,000	Band B £40,001 to £52,000	Band C £52,001 to £68,000	Band D £68,001 to £88,000	Band E £88,001 to £120,000	Band F £120,001 to £160,000	Band G £160,001 to £320,000	Band H Over £320,000
Ratio to Band D	6/9	7/9	8/9	1	11/9	13/9	15/9	2
North East	774	903	1,032	1,161	1,419	1,677	1,936	2,323
North West	757	883	1,009	1,135	1,387	1,639	1,891	2,270
Yorkshire and the Humber	714	833	952	1,071	1,309	1,547	1,785	2,141
East Midlands	750	875	1,000	1,125	1,375	1,625	1,875	2,250
West Midlands	729	850	972	1,093	1,336	1,579	1,822	2,187
East of England	744	867	991	1,115	1,363	1,611	1,859	2,231
London	705	823	940	1,058	1,293	1,528	1,763	2,116
South East	732	854	976	1,098	1,342	1,587	1,831	2,197
South West	742	866	990	1,113	1,361	1,608	1,855	2,227
England	735	857	979	1,102	1,347	1,591	1,836	2,204

Fire-related Deaths

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his current target is for the reduction of deaths from fire by 2004. [127230]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's target set, following the 2000 spending review, is to reduce the number of fire-related deaths in the home by 20 per cent. averaged over the five year period to 31 March 2004 compared with the average for the five-year period to 31 March 1999. The base line figure is 379, so the average in the five years ending 31 March 2004 would need to be no more than 303.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff the Department and each agency and non-departmental public body for which the Department is responsible had in each year since 1997; and what the cost of those staff was in each of those years. [122299]

Yvette Cooper: Data on staffing levels in the civil service are collected from Departments and agencies twice-yearly, in April and October. Headline figures are published under National Statistics guidelines via a press notice. Those for October 2002 were published on 27 February 2003.

A copy of the press notice, accompanying media brief and supporting tables is available on the world wide web at www.civil-service.gov.uk/statistics. Copies of these documents are also available in the Libraries of the House.

More detailed information on the civil service is published annually in "Civil Service Statistics", copies of which are laid in the Libraries of the House. The last edition, based on April 2001 data, was published in June 2002. The next edition, based on April 2002 data, is due to be published at the end of July 2003.

Cabinet Office publishes information on non-departmental public bodies in its annual publication "Public Bodies". The information includes details of the number of staff employed by each NDPB at 31 March each year. "Public Bodies 2002" was published in January 2003. Copies of "Public Bodies" published each year since 1997 are available in the Libraries of the House.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was established in May 2002. Information on staff costs was published in the Office's annual report 2003, and in the annual report and accounts for each agency and executive non-departmental public body since 1997. Copies of these reports are available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has for redeployment of members of his Department out of London and the south-east. [125393]

Yvette Cooper: The scope for relocating Government activity is being considered by Sir Michael Lyons. His independent review was announced in the Chancellor's Budget statement on 9 April.

Details of the review, including the consultation launched on 19 June, can be found on the HM Treasury website at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk. Sir Michael will report his findings on the scope for relocating Departments and other public sector bodies before the end of the year.

Disabled Facilities Grant

Mr. Berry: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans his Department has to review the working of the disabled facilities grant test of resources in relation to adaptations for disabled children; and if he will make a statement. [126303]

Keith Hill: The means test for disabled facilities grant (DFG) is kept under continual review and updated annually. The means test is broadly based on the eligibility rules for housing benefit and compares weekly household income with a set of standardised expenditure allowances. In cases where a household contains a disabled child the DFG means test provides for a higher housing cost allowance, which has the effect of increasing the level of grant entitlement for that household.

Environmentally Friendly Procurement

Linda Perham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent guidance he has given to local authorities on environmentally friendly procurement. [127780]

Phil Hope: Local authorities are responsible within the Law for making their own decisions on procurement. In doing so they will no doubt consider the case for environmentally friendly procurement, consistent with the European Union Procurement Directives and domestic law, which includes the duty of Best Value. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister set out its views on Best Value and procurement in Circular 03/2003. This included the Government's definition of Best Value as "the optimum combination of whole life costs and benefits to meet the customer's requirement."

This approach enables sustainability and quality to be taken into account when service delivery options are being considered.

European Constitution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions he has had with *(a)* colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and *(b)* counterparts in the European Union about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European Constitution. [124783]

Yvette Cooper: As part of the normal Whitehall process Ministers and officials have had regular correspondence with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss all aspects of the Convention, including legislative competence. In line with exceptions 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the normal practice of Governments to disclose details about internal discussions, or information whose disclosure would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the *(a)* projected total spend and *(b)* total allocation of the European Regional Development Fund is for financial year 2003–04, broken down by region. [125846]

Yvette Cooper: European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is planned in calendar years rather than English financial years. Figures in the table below show details of allocations and targets for each region, both for this and the following calendar year. Spend so far for this year is also shown. Whilst spend is difficult to project (e.g. because of exchange rate fluctuations) regions are working to reach the targets shown.

(£000)

Region	*ERDF Spend 1 January 2001 to July 2003*	*2003 Allocation*	*End December 2003 target*	*2004 Allocation*	*End December 2004 target*
North West (Merseyside)	15,970	81,394	84,590	71,948	82,929
South West (Cornwall and Scilly Isles)	12,973	27,576	27,820	24,873	27,453
Yorkshire and Humber (South Yorkshire)	16,591	71,542	74,387	63,311	72,965
East of England	5,704	13,367	21,954	11,695	13,691
East Midlands	11,710	32,181	52,512	28,208	32,916
London	11,660	21,387	31,385	19,585	21,153
North East	16,129	54,465	84,445	48,891	54,714
North West	48,168	75,988	133,287	64,270	79,739
South East	999	3,360	6,239	2,771	3,588
South West	5,938	14,505	23,056	12,861	14,711
West Midlands	23,426	66,701	121,78 8	56,768	69,695
Yorkshire and Humber	11,802	42,065	68,063	36,852	43,043
Total	181,069	504,532	729,526	442,032	516,595

Note:

All figures are in £000s. Allocations and targets (originally in Euros) are based on an average exchange rate since the beginning of the programmes (1 Euro = £0.628).

Fire Service College

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the Fire Service College provides services to brigades in Scotland [127208]

Mr. Raynsford: Yes. The Fire Service College at Moreton in Marsh has unique facilities that are used to provide training for fire brigades across the UK and world-wide.

Somali Community

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on local authority support for Somali community organisations; and what advice his Department gives to local authorities in respect of applications for funding. [127392]

Mr. Raynsford: Local authority support for Somali community organisations is a matter for individual local authorities. The local government finance system takes into account the costs local authorities face in educating children who need additional support in English or who come from low-achieving ethnic backgrounds. There is also a top-up to reflect the cost of translation services.

Home Improvements (VAT)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions he has had with *(a)* other Government Departments, *(b)* housing bodies and *(c)* other interested bodies on reducing VAT on home improvements for poor housing; and if he will make a statement. [126244]

Keith Hill: The Government will continue to consider the use of economic instruments to support regeneration and encourage brownfield development. Discussions with other Government Departments, housing bodies and other interested bodies touch on a wide variety of issues, including possible options for encouraging improvements to poor housing.

Homelessness

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much it cost per week on average to house temporarily a homeless family in priority need in the last year for which figures are available; and what the total cost was of housing such families. [124694]

Yvette Cooper: Information annually reported to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister by local authorities identifies expenditure incurred in respect of bed and breakfast, private sector leasing and all other forms of temporary accommodation used by homeless households. This includes associated costs, such as the provision of furniture, property maintenance/refurbishment, rent guarantees, nomination fees and administrative costs, chargeable to the general fund services revenue account, along with any specific capital charges. Latest available information is for 2001–02, when it is estimated that gross expenditure on homelessness in England amounted to some £436.0 million. Net total costs—after taking in o account rents received directly from tenants, and housing benefit payments such as rent allowance—amounted to £190.75 million. In addition, net expenditure on homelessness funded from the housing revenue account—for example where the local authority's own vacant stock is used on a temporary basis—was estimated at £21.6 million.

The return does not seek corresponding information on average unit costs but, from estimates of household-days spent in temporary accommodation derived from quarterly statistical returns, it is estimated that the overall average gross cost per household during 2001–02, including HRA-funded expenditure, was some £156 per week. The average net cost per household, excluding housing benefit/rent allowances and rent payments met directly by tenants, was £73 per week.

Housing Stock

Mr. Pike: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received on *(a)* improving poor housing stock and *(b)* tackling problems of empty homes through financial grants; and if he will make a statement. [126245]

Keith Hill: The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002, which took effect on 18 July 2002, gave local authorities new and wide ranging powers to provide financial assistance, including by way of grant, for these purposes. The Government consulted a wide range of stakeholders before introducing these new powers and there was overwhelming support for these changes.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research he has commissioned to examine whether financial assistance would help to tackle poor housing stock and empty homes in the Pathfinder housing renewal areas; and if he will make a statement. [126246]

Keith Hill: Identification of the nine market renewal pathfinder areas and the policy approach on low demand and abandonment set out in "Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future" has been underpinned by a range of data available to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, in particular Housing Investment Programme data and other published evidence including regional and local level data published by CURS at the University of Birmingham on changing demand.

A key remit of the pathfinders is to restructure the housing markets in their areas so that they are returned to places where people want to live and stay. We are clear that this is not something that can be left to the market alone to resolve. That route offers a prospect of years of neglect that will endanger economic resurgence and cause untold suffering for the communities affected. Turning round these areas will require long-term commitment. We have already signalled the Government's commitment through the creation of a £500 million market renewal fund for investment in the pathfinder areas over the next three years. Tackling poor housing stock and empty homes will be a crucial part of the pathfinders work.

Illegal Travellers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent meetings he has had with *(a)* the police and *(b)* ministerial colleagues on the cost to local authorities

of dealing with illegal travellers; what plans he has to assist local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [125974]

Yvette Cooper: Ministers in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister have not recently met with the police or with other ministerial colleagues to specifically discuss costs to local authorities in removing illegal Gypsy and Traveller camps.

However, in drafting the new joint guide on managing unauthorised camping, officials in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in conjunction with the Home Office, has met and consulted with various stakeholders including the Association of Chief Police Officers, and the Local Government Association. Costs to local authorities in removing illegal encampments were discussed among other issues.

The new joint guide will be published and made available for use by local authorities and police services by the end of the summer.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much money each English local authority has spent in each of the last five years for which figures are available on *(a)* the results of flytipping and *(b)* the cost of the (i) administration involved in dealing with travellers and (ii) clearing up after they have moved on; and if he will make a statement. [125980]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

These data are not collected centrally so the information is not available in the format requested.

The Environment Agency has estimated that the total cost of clearing fly tipping by all stakeholders is 100 million. ENCAMS (Environmental Campaigns) also recently completed a survey, where costs were assessed on a different basis. The results of this survey suggested an average spend on clearing fly tipping for each local authority in 2002 of 54,258. No estimates are available, however, to indicate the costs associated with clearing incidents caused by particular individuals or groups of individuals.

A clause in the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill currently before Parliament will, if successful, require local authorities and the Agency to submit annual data returns to Defra on the amounts and type of illegally dumped waste they deal with. These measures are expected to come into effect in the summer of 2004 and will mean, for the first time, that national data on fly tipping levels will be available.

Climate Change

Miss Anne McIntosh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the arrangements for regional co-ordination of the UK position in international climate change negotiations. [127861]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

International climate change negotiations are the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Secretary of State writes to the Devolved Administrations, ahead of each Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to set out the key issues for the negotiations. Officials from the Devolved Administrations have the opportunity to input to the preparations for these and other technical negotiations, and have been in the UK delegation attending them.

Islington Borough Council

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what monitoring is being undertaken by his Department's representatives of the financial performance of the Islington borough council; and what assessment he has made of the accounting procedures at the council. [127395]

Mr. Raynsford: As part of the Government's engagement policy with poorly performing authorities a Government monitoring board has been set up to advise Ministers of Islington's progress against its agreed recovery plan, including targets and milestones on financial performance.

However, the assessment of the council's performance is a matter for the auditor, not the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Although Islington received an unqualified audit opinion on the accounts for 2001–02, a number of improvement areas have been identified in the recovery plan, and the district auditor has drawn up an audit plan for 2003–04, which reflects the areas requiring improvement and the priorities in the recovery plan.

Licensing Laws

Ross Cranston: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to alter the rules governing planning use class orders following the changes to the licensing laws in the Licensing Act 2003; and if he will make a statement. [127146]

Keith Hill: I refer to the Written Statement made by my hon. Friend for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), on 4 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 79WS, which stated that it is the Government's intention to change the Use Classes Order so as to put pubs and bars into a separate class. The effect of this change will be to require an application to be made for planning permission in respect of any proposal to change use of an existing building into a pub or bar.

I expect to make a full statement on the outcome of our consultation on proposals for changes to the Use Classes Order early in the autumn session.

Local Authorities (Borrowing)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proposals he has for allowing councils to borrow on the security of *(a)* council housing stock, *(b)* rent income from council housing and *(c)* service charges on council housing; and whether he intends that such borrowing would have to be approved by (i) his Department and (ii) HM Treasury. [126585]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not consider it prudent for local authorities to borrow against the security of their capital assets, since the potential seizure of property by creditors would pose an unacceptable threat to the delivery of services. Similarly it is not proposed to allow authorities to sell future streams of revenue such as rents, in return for immediate one-off payments. The Local Government

Bill will allow authorities to borrow without Government consent, provided that they can afford to service the debt from their own revenues, which could include housing income.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Betts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on whether all local authority tenants will continue to have a choice about who their landlord is. [126167]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's policy is that tenants should be at the heart of decision making on the future of their homes. In delivering decent homes local authorities will need to fully engage with tenants on deciding what the best option is for all stakeholders.

There are four options for local authorities to deliver the decent homes target: investment in the stock by the local authority using existing resources, PFI, setting up an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) or stock transfer. The first three of these leave the stock in local authority ownership.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which local authorities he has visited since May 2002. [121812]

Yvette Cooper: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister regularly visits local authority projects and meets local authority councillors and officers, since May 2002 the Deputy Prime Minister has visited Allerdale, Barking and Dagenham, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Bradford, Brighton, Coventry, Dartford, Doncaster, Eden, Gateshead, Greenwich, Harlow, Harrogate, Kensington and Chelsea, Kingston-upon-Hull, Lambeth, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Milton Keynes, Medway, Newcastle, North Lincolnshire, Salford, Sefton, Watford, Windsor and Maidenhead and York.

Local Government Act

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many applications he has received from local authorities under sections 2 and 5 of the Local Government Act 2000; how many applications have been determined by his Department; and what mechanisms are in place for dealing with such applications outside arrangements made in the course of the negotiations of local public service agreements. [126914]

Keith Hill: Nine applications or expressions of interest have been received for action under section 5 of the Local Government Act 2000. Applications are assessed by the Department responsible for the relevant area of policy in conjunction with this Office. One application has so far been addressed through provision made in primary legislation. Others are subject to on-going discussions with the relevant local authorities.

Large Scale Voluntary Transfers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many local authorities have implemented large scale voluntary housing transfers (LSVTs) since 1997; how many have been rejected by tenants; how many have put up proposals for large scale voluntary transfers; and how many have not yet registered their interest. [126421]

Keith Hill: 86 local authorities have completed 117 large scale voluntary transfers since 1 April 1997. During this period, tenants have not supported the transfer proposal in 23 ballots. There are 38 transfer schemes in progress. Housing transfer is one of three options available to authorities for meeting the decent home target where additional resources are required. By July 2005, all stock-owning authorities are required to have completed an investment option appraisal, with the full involvement of tenants, to decide on the best means of meeting the decent home target for their stock. These investment option appraisals must be signed off by the relevant Government Office for the Regions.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many applications for large scale voluntary transfers of council housing have been accepted by his Department; and what arrangements at what cost have been made in each case for write-off or reduction of overcharging housing debt; [126422]

(2) how much he estimates will be provided in *(a)* this and *(b)* the next financial year (i) to write off overhanging housing debt for local authorities who privatise their housing stock and (ii) for council house repairs and renovations in those authorities in the same years. [126559]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has accepted 268 applications for large-scale voluntary transfer of council housing since 1988. When an authority transfers all its housing stock it is expected to use the receipt to meet any debt liability. Of the 173 transfers that have taken place to date, there have been 10 transfers where the receipt was insufficient and the office made an overhanging debt payment. The payments are tabled as follows:

Financial year	*Local authority*	*£ million*
1999–2000	Burnley	21.0
2001–02	Coventry	111.7
2001–02	Calderdale	64.6
2001–02	Blackburn with Darwen	78.9
2002–03	St. Helens	87.2
2002–03	Redcar and Cleveland	25.4
2002–03	Knowsley	126.1
2002–03	Carlisle	18.0
2002–03	Bradford	182.8
2002–03	Walsall	108.7

The projected overhanging debt payments have reduced to £24 million for 2003–04 and are estimated at £500 million for 2004–05. These are likely to change as details of transfer proposals are finalised. These payments reflect the liability the office would have had to meet as ongoing Housing Revenue Account (HRA) subsidy if these authorities retained their stock. In respect of the authorities liable to require overhanging debt payments over the two years concerned, the total estimated provision for the Major Repairs Allowances (MRA) within the Housing Revenue Account subsidy is £124.2 million in 2003–04 and £122.3 million in 2004–05.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proposals he has for issuing to each tenant balloted in large scale voluntary housing transfers a statement of the benefits they will receive from a yes vote and the extra spending it will bring for repairs and improvements. [126423]

Keith Hill: None. Local authorities are required by section 106, and schedule 3A to, the Housing Act 1985 to serve notice of the details of the transfer proposal, including the identity of the new landlord and the likely consequences of the disposal for the tenant, to all secure and introductory tenants.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what sanctions are imposed on housing associations which do not fulfil promises made to tenants in large scale voluntary transfers of council housing; what redress is available to tenants in the event of such transfers; and how many complaints have been made to his Department about such purchases in the last five years. [126425]

Keith Hill: The Housing Corporation is responsible for regulating all Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), commonly known as housing associations. RSLs are required to adhere to the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code and guidance which sets out minimum standards in the three areas of governance, financial viability and management of services to tenant. It also has a number of general and specific powers to take action is respect of housing associations.

All housing associations registered with the Corporation must have procedures to deal with complaints from tenants fairly and effectively. Once tenants have been through this procedure, they can bring the matter to the attention of the Independent Housing Ombudsman. There is no formal procedure for complaints to be made to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister or investigated by it.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much was paid to each local authority per council house that has opted for large scale voluntary transfer of its council stock in each of the last two years. [126558]

Keith Hill: To reflect the intended continued use of the properties for social housing the price paid to each local authority per council house accords with a Tenanted Market Value (TMV) rather than an open market value. Tabled are the price paid per dwelling in each large scale voluntary transfer since April 2001 in accordance with this valuation method.

Price per dwelling in large scale voluntary transfers since April 2001

Authority	*Date of transfer*	*Price per dwelling (£)* [1]
Derbyshire Dales	4 March 2002	7,616
Chelmsford BC	11 March 2002	11,530
East Hertfordshire DC (split transfer)	18 March 2002	11,937
		13,725
Erewash BC	25 March 2002	6,460
Reigate and Banstead BC	25 March 2002	13,212
St. Edmundsbury	24 June 2002	7,489
Vale Royal BC	1 July 2002	7,462
St. Helen's MBC	1 July 2002	1,974
Redcar and Cleveland BC	15 July 2002	5,180
Knowsley MBC	15 July 2002	1,794
LB Waltham Forest	30 September 2002	832
LB Hackney cc sheltered stock	14 October 2002	-1,514
LB Harrow	14 October 2002	-3,642
Manchester cc Langley Estate	18 November 2002	-342
County of Herefordshire C	25 November 2002	6,945
Carlisle CC	9 December 2002	1,803
Rushcliffe BC	20 January 2003	12,934
Liverpool CC Eastern Fringe (south)	23 January 2003	1,800
Liverpool CC Eastern Fringe (central)	30 January 2003	-1,378
City of Bradford	24 February 2003	2,831
Amber Valley BC	24 February 2003	5,077
Crewe and Nantwich BC	10 March 2003	6,181
Liverpool CC	10 March 2003	-728
Oldham MBC Limeside (Hollins/The Avenues)	17 March 2003	-1,577
Walsall MBC (majority of stock)	27 March 2003	1,026
Walsall MBC (tenant managed stock)	27 March 2003	-0.03
Craven DC	31 March 2003	5,201
Forest of Dean DC	31 March 2003	6,849
North Hertfordshire DC	31 March 2003	3,128

[1] Negative value figures indicate a dowry payment from the local authority to the acquiring registered social landlord.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether consultants and tenants' friends employed on large scale voluntary transfer proposals for council housing are *(a)* approved, *(b)* nominated and *(c)* paid for by his Department; what steps he takes to ensure their impartiality; and whether any have recommended that the large scale voluntary transfer should not proceed. [126561]

Keith Hill: Both consultants and tenant advisers are employed and paid for by the local authority. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister guidance is that they should be chosen through a competitive process. The role of the tenant adviser is to offer impartial advice and support to the tenants and leaseholders about the proposals being draw up. This is set out in guidance on the recruitment

and role of the tenant adviser issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The nature of any work being undertaken by a consultant will depend on the nature of the contract with the local authority. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister would not necessarily know where a consultant had advised an authority.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) whether publicity polling and consultancy fees for voluntary transfers of council housing stock can be financed out of the local housing revenue account; [126565]

(2) what estimate he has made of the costs of publicity polling, publishing information, consultancy fees and preparation and polling processes for large scale voluntary transfer of council housing pools over the last 12 months; and how much of this has been paid for by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* central Government. [126568]

Keith Hill: Expenditure incurred in carrying out the statutory consultation required under section 106A of the Housing Act 1985, including the cost of any ballot, is considered to be in connection with the management of dwellings held within the Housing Management Account and therefore must be charged to that account.

No payment is made by central Government towards the cost of such consultation and figures for the total expenditure on this by local authorities are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Media Training

Mr. Flight: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost was to his Department of media and voice training for ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123130]

Yvette Cooper: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was created on 29 May 2002. Expenditure on media skills training has been as follows:

	Ministers	*Officials (£)*
29 May 2002–31 March 2003	nil	9,165.00
1 April 2003–30 June 2003	nil	3,053.62

Mobile Telephone Masts

Jim Dowd: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 10 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 998W, on mobile telephone masts, what action he plans to ensure greater adherence by network operators to the code of best practice on mobile phone network development. [126556]

Keith Hill: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 10 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 998W. The Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Network Developments, which was produced jointly by representatives of central and local government and the mobile phone industry, built on Government guidance and the operators' Ten Commitments. The Code has only been in operation since last November.

On Tuesday 15 July 2003 Deloitte and Touche published their report of the Implementation Review of the Ten Commitments to Best Siting Practice for the UK Mobile Industry. A copy of the report is available in the Library of the House. The opinion of Deloitte & Touche is the evidence they have seen of the operators' processes and procedures during the review fairly reflects the operators' assertion that they have made demonstrable progress in implementing the Ten Commitments. However, given the relatively new nature of some of the Commitments at the time of the review some of the processes were not fully operational and there were some areas where implementation was not comprehensive or thorough. Deloitte and Touche made 46 recommendations for improving procedures and all the mobile network operators have accepted all the recommendations.

The operators are committed to commissioning another review in a year's time and I will be asking them to extend the scope of that review to include observance of the Code. This will enable us to assess how effectively the Code has been put into operation since its introduction and whether any changes need to be made.

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make it his policy *(a)* to take into account regional wage differentials in distributing the neighbourhood renewal fund and *(b)* to apply an area cost adjustment to the calculation. [124746]

Yvette Cooper: The Government's policy for determining eligibility for and distributing Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) resources is based on the Indices of Deprivation 2000 (ID2000). This applies to the £900 million of NRF resources that have been allocated, as part of Spending Review 2000 (SR2000), in 2001–02 to 2003–04, and to the additional £975 million of NRF resources provided for in Spending Review 2002 (SR2002) for 2004–05 and 2005–06.

New Housing

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the Government's target is for new housing to be built on derelict urban land. [126765]

Keith Hill: The national target is that, by 2008, 60 per cent. of new housing should be provided on previously-developed land and through conversions of existing buildings. The definition of previously-developed land is provided in Planning Policy Guidance note 3: "Housing" and includes derelict urban land.

Partnership Agreements

Angela Eagle: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he plans to conclude a partnership agreement with the trade unions representing the staff in his Department. [117462]

Yvette Cooper: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and its agencies enjoy a positive and productive relationship with the trade unions working in partnership together to address staffing issues and matters of mutual interest. Given this approach there

are currently no plans to conclude a partnership agreement but this is kept under review.

Planning Policy Guidance 13

Linda Perham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent representations he has received on the relationship between Planning Policy Guidance 13 and flexible working practices. [127857]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has received one MP's letter dated 19 June on behalf of a third party on this issue, and has not received any representations on this issue on behalf of anyone else.

Projects Assistance (Chorley)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which projects in Chorley have been assisted by the Government Office for the North West in the past three years; and what assistance was provided in each case. [126456]

Yvette Cooper: Government Office for the North West offers guidance and support for a range of initiatives in Chorley. This includes providing, or helping to secure, funding for the following projects in the borough:

Project	*Investment (£)*	*Period*
CCTV: Chorley Town Centre/Secured Car Parks	120,223	1999–2002
Communities Against Drugs	162,000	2001–03
Safer Communities Initiative	28,766	2002/03
Partnership Development Fund	91,596	2001–03
Small Retailers in Deprived Areas/Security for Small Retailers	10,000	2002/03
Chorley Interchange	2.6 million	Completed 2003
Barnardo's Chorley Families Project	119,903	2002–04
Chorley and South Ribble Primary Care Trust Health Promotion unit	50,100	2002–04
South Lancashire Arts Partnership: Chorley Rural Sports and Art Project	61,600 (estimated)	2003/04
Chorley Carers Project	750	2000–03
Age Concern Lancashire	1,000	2000–03
Chorley Disability Sports Forum	200	2000–03
St. John Ambulance	200	2000–03
Chorley Village Website	400	2000–03
Creative Minds	500	2000–03
Clayton Brook Community House	1,500	2000–03
Service Improvement for People with Learning Disabilities	250	2000–03
Croston Rural Action Group	200	2000–03
Chorley/South Ribble Disability Forum	500	2000–03
Eccleston Community Environment Trust	375	2000–03
Chorley/South Ribble Mental Health Alliance	570	2000–03
Chorley Environmental Forum: Green Vehicles Exhibition	500	2002

Public Housing

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on public housing investment in *(a)* the south-east and *(b)* the south-west; how many homes were built in the south-west in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement on the reasons underlying the trend. [126932]

Keith Hill: The policy of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on public housing investment is set out in "Sustainable Communities in the South East and Sustainable Communities in the South West", which made clear the actions that will be taken on a regional basis to deliver a step change in addressing the balance between supply and demand of housing.

Funding for the provision of affordable housing in the south-west has increased to £81 million for 2003–04, compared to just under £62 million for 2002–03. The programme is expected to deliver around 2,000 new affordable homes for the region in 2003–04. Funding for the provision of affordable housing in the south-east has increased to £146 million, compared to just under £114 million for 2002–03. The programme is expected to deliver around 3,000 new affordable homes for the region in 2003–04.

The table shows the supply of new dwellings built in the south-west in each of the last 10 years.

	New homes built
1992–93	14,873
1993–94	15,171
1994–95	16,772
1995–96	16,884
1996–97	16,642
1997–98	19,003
1998–99	15,929
1999–2000	15,912
2000–01	14,979
2001–02	15,575
2002–03	15,943

Source:
Returns from local authorities and the National House Building Council to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

To better understand the reasons underlying the low responsiveness of housing supply to demand pressures in the UK, the Chancellor and Deputy Prime Minister have asked Kate Barker to conduct a review of issues affecting housing supply in the UK. The review will deliver an interim report by autumn 2003.

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the bar chart on page 2 of the annual report and accounts 2002–03 of the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre gives a fair representation of the evolution of the centre's surplus on ordinary activities. [126234]

Yvette Cooper: The accounts of the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre have been given an unqualified Opinion by the Comptroller and Auditor General in all the years represented. Therefore, the figures shown in the bar chart on page 2 in relation to surplus on ordinary activities can be considered audited and accurate.

Tenancy Money

Dr. Desmond Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place copies of the submissions to his consultation paper, "Tenancy Money: probity and protection" in the Library. [126758]

Keith Hill: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 1362.

Dr. Desmond Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list those persons and organisations who responded to the consultation paper "Tenancy Money: probity and protection", broken down by *(a)* landlords, *(b)* tenants and *(c)* others. [126750]

Keith Hill: The information requested is as follows:

Landlords:

John Allen
Forebury Estates Ltd.
M. Gora
George Wilder &Yvonne Hawkins
M. P. Davis
Jan Kamburoff
BR & J. Green Letting
Rigby Properties
Blaxhill Estates
Kath & Nick Heirons
R. F. Maycock
G. Foers
Exeter Property
M. G. Beech
John Pybus
Malcolm Pither
Paul & Heather Wiles
Mrs. P. E. Cook
+ 8 anonymous

Tenants:

3 anonymous

Others:

Flintshire County Council
Ashton Wingate Ltd.
Edward Taub & Co.
Training for Professionals
Forebury Estates Limited
Thomas Winter Insurance
The UK Association of Letting Agents Ltd.
The Rent Service
R. W. Goldie
Jack Tennison
Independent Housing Ombudsman Ltd.
Lettings-landlords.co.uk
Robert Jordan & Associates
Cleeve Residential Lettings
City of Bradford MDC
Wirral Council
Aabee Homes
Bradford & Bingley Letting Agents
Brighton & Hove Private Sector Housing Forum
Gedling Borough Council
Kensington & Chelsea Housing Advice Service
University of Sheffield Union of Students
LB Greenwich
Lacors
Dermot McKibbon
LB Hammersmith & Fulham
Southern Private Landlords Association
Sefton MBC
Housing Advice Service Kensington & Chelsea (HASKC)
Exeter Housing Group
Legal Action Group
National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux
Association of Residential Letting Agents
Hanover Park Services plc t/a HomeLet
Brighton & Hove Private Sector Housing Forum
Brent Private Tenants' Rights Group
Cardiff Bond Board
Housing Needs & Strategy Unit, Burnley Borough Council
Streetwise Property Rentals (Scotland)
Association of Letting & Management Agents (ALMA)
Department of Housing Services, Nottingham City Council
The Law Society
Braintree District Council
Bury & Walkers acting for Leeds Property Association
British Property Federation
Association of Tenancy Relations Officers
The Country Land and Business Association
The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea
Housing Law Practitioners Association
Local Government Association
National Union of Students
The National Rent Deposit Forum (NRDF)
Homelessness Strategy for Ipswich Borough Council
Chartered Institute of Housing
Dorset Residential Landlords Association
National Federation of Residential Landlords
Birmingham City Council
The National Association of Estate Agents
Shelter
Countrywide Residential Lettings
National Approved Letting Scheme
Office of Fair Trading
Celtic Properties
The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
North Staffordshire Landlords Association Limited
Roger Barton
The Letting Centre
+ 1 anonymous, 1 who asked to remain confidential

Dr. Desmond Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his written ministerial statement of 16 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 2WS, on what basis he calculated that the cost of a national tenancy deposit scheme would be £19 million per annum and the benefits equal to £20 million. [126812]

Keith Hill: The calculations for both these figures are to be found in Annex 1 of the consultation paper "Tenancy Money: probity and protection". They start from a figure derived from the Survey of English Housing (SEH), that there are 127,000 tenancies ending each year in which there is a dispute about the deposit. The total cost is found from multiplying this figure by the average cost of each adjudication in the pilot Tenancy Deposit Scheme (TDS), £150. The benefit is found from multiplying the derived figure on deposit disputes by the average level of deposit (£510, SEH data) and by the average proportion of the total deposit an independent adjudicator would consider should be returned to the tenant (31 per cent. taken from data on disputes in the TDS).

Mr. Pound: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of *(a)* the maximum annual adjudication costs and *(b)* the likely annual adjudication costs of a statutory rent deposit protection scheme. [127050]

Keith Hill: As my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) mentioned in his statement of 16 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 2WS, it is estimated that adjudication costs of a statutory scheme would be £19 million. This is a best estimate based on survey findings of tenancy numbers and level of deposit, statistics on perceived prevalence of wrongful withholding of deposit moneys, and the adjudication cost per dispute in the pilot scheme.

Mr. Pound: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimates he has made of the amount of interest that would be generated by holding all rent deposit money in a single custodial scheme. [127051]

Keith Hill: The consultation paper "Tenancy Money: probity and protection" provides an assessment in paragraph 35 of the Regulatory Impact Assessment at Annex 1. It noted that if £790 million (the amount estimated to be currently held in deposits) was held in a single custodial deposit scheme for a year, it would raise £31.6 million in interest (calculated at the Bank of England's then current base-rate).

Mr. Pound: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many responses were received to the consultation on "Tenancy money: probity and protection"; how many responses were received from *(a)* individual landlords and agents and their representative bodies and *(b)* individual tenants and their representative bodies; of those respondents who were not individual landlords, agents and tenants or their representative bodies, what percentage of respondents were (i) in favour and (ii) not in favour of a statutory custodial scheme to protect tenants' deposits. [127052]

Keith Hill: Ninety-eight responses were received. Of these, 26 were from landlords and nine from landlord organisations; eight from letting agents and five from agent organisations; three from tenants and four from tenant organisations/representatives; 13 from local authorities; 24 from other organisations (of which 16 were public or voluntary sector); two from other interested individuals; and four from respondents whose type was not known.

Of the 43 respondents not in categories involved in letting or their representatives, 30 responded to the options concerning whether there should be Government intervention; and if so, of the three options which each included a statutory custodial scheme, which option they favoured. Two favoured no intervention; four favoured or appeared to favour a statutory scheme, but with no further details; favoured a custodial scheme as the sole option; two favoured a custodial scheme plus approved insured alternatives; five favoured a custodial scheme plus membership of an approved trade association or accreditation scheme that would provide insurance. There were four further options involving deposits (that did not involved a statutory custodial scheme), which respondents could indicate either instead of or in addition to the ones mentioned here.

Waste Disposal Applications

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the refusal rate for waste disposal applications within the terms of county matters was for the last four quarters of the year. [126918]

Keith Hill: For 'County Matter' applications, the provisional numbers supplied to this Office for the four quarters ending 31 March 2003 show a total of 105 refused applications among the 1,154 decisions on waste applications. This is a refusal rate of 9 per cent. As there are relatively small numbers of 'County Matter' applications made and decided each quarter, refusal rates for individual quarters can be quite volatile. In 2002–03, the quarterly refusal rates ranged from 7 per cent. to 12 per cent.

CABINET OFFICE

European Constitution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what discussions he has had with *(a)* colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and *(b)* counterparts in the European Union about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European constitution. [124782]

Mr. Alexander: As part of the normal Whitehall process my officials have had regular contact with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss all aspects of the Convention, including legislative competences. My officials have also had regular contact with Member and Accession States to discuss issues arising in the Convention. In line with exemptions 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the normal practice of Governments to disclose details about internal discussions, or information whose disclosure would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs.

Media Training

Mr. Flight: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the cost was to his Department of media and voice training for Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123118]

Mr. Alexander: No training in media or voice training has been provided for Ministers by my Department.

Cabinet Office runs four programmes specifically for officials who deal with the media and make presentations. From 2001–02 to date, 12 officials have attended the programmes at a total cost of £3,450.

Figures before 2001–02 are not available.

Additionally, a one-off voice coaching workshop for seven CMPS officials who regularly give presentations was held on 17 June 2003 at a cost of £1,189.10.

Ombudsmen

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress has been made in restructuring and improving the various ombudsmen's services. [125229]

Mr. Alexander: The latest position is set out in the Government's response (Cm 5890) to the Public Administration Select Committee's recent report on Ombudsman issues (HC448), published on 22 July. I have sent a copy to my hon. Friend.

Public Sector Leadership

Mr. Norman: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) what measures he has put in place in the last two years to *(a)* track the career moves and *(b)* monitor the improvement of individual public sector leaders, as referred to in the Strategy Unit Report on Strengthening Leadership within the Public Sector; [126696]

(2) what measures he has put in place within the last two years to gather data on *(a)* career progression and *(b)* wastage rates of public sector leaders, as referred to in the Strategy Unit Report on Strengthening Leadership within the Public Sector. [126697]

Mr. Alexander: A significant number of actions have been taken in the last two years to improve and measure public sector leadership.

In the Civil Service, the Senior Appointments Selection Committee (SASC) takes a strategic overview of senior appointments, succession planning and leadership development. Over the last year, SASC (supported by the Cabinet Office) has shifted its annual succession planning round with the aim of providing a more strategic overview of talent in the SCS and those with potential for top posts. It includes individual Departments' assessment of their short- and long-term skills needs to meet priorities, an assessment of their current talent pools and what they are doing to develop individuals through career moves and broader development.

The Cabinet Office also collects data on the Senior Civil Service workforce, which include information on progression rates through SCS Pay Bands and leavers. These data are used to inform SASC's succession planning overview.

In the wider public services, priority has been given to strengthening leadership. For example, in the NHS through the NHS Leadership Centre, in Schools with the introduction of the Leadership Incentive Grant, and the Police with the establishment of the Central Police Training and Development Authority last year. There has also been a focus on monitoring leadership improvement through inspection, for example the Local Government Comprehensive Performance Assessment corporate reviews.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fair Trade

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent proposals the Government have tabled in the EU to *(a)* promote fair trade between the EU and developing countries and *(b)* prevent unfair competition by EU companies and agriculture with developing countries. [125744]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government are working through the EU and with all WTO members to ensure the Doha Trade Round negotiations provide a fairer framework for international trade. A better deal for developing countries is part of the Government's objectives at the WTO Ministerial in Cancun this September. The recent agreement on reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy enhances the prospects of success.

Research and Development

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on trends in Government spending on research and development. [126553]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my right hon. Friend to the written ministerial statement I made on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 46WS.

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of the impact of Government research and development spending on English regions. [126552]

Jacqui Smith: No such assessment has been made. However, Government research and development spending—both within higher education institutes and outside of higher education institutes—is tracked regionally through the ONS regional trend series. The most recent figures available—for 2000—were published last year (ONS, Regional Trends 37, Table 13.9).

British Electricity Transmission and Trading Arrangements

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans there are for *(a)* her Department and *(b)* Ofgem to carry out an environmental appraisal of the British Electricity Transmission and Trading Arrangements. [126722]

CHADWYCK-HEALEY

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Mr. Timms: A Regulatory Impact Assessment has been carried out on BETTA and is available on the DTI website http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/domestic_markets/electricity_trading/ria.pdf. The RIA includes a section on the environmental impact of BETTA.

British Energy

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the condition that British Energy was to complete the sale of Amergen by 30 June 2003 was included in the restructuring package submitted to the EU on 7 March 2003. [126654]

Mr. Timms: Full details of British Energy's restructuring plan were given to the European Commission in our submission on 7 March 2003. The submission is confidential between the Government and the Commission.

China (British Financial Services)

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received regarding the scale of the British financial services industry in China; and if she will make a statement. [126577]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: TPUK regularly receives requests from UK based financial services companies for support for their China market activities.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I shall be leading a high-powered business delegation to Beijing and Shanghai from 20–22 July which will include several financial services companies. I shall be raising a number of trade-related issues with the Chinese leadership, including pressing the case for increased market access by British financial services providers to the Chinese domestic market in line with China's WTO commitments. I will also be seeking a relaxation of some of the administrative and technical hurdles that currently exist (for example the high capitalisation requirements for banks and insurance companies and the lengthy waiting period for second and subsequent branches).

At the same time, I shall be encouraging members of the local Chinese business community I meet to take greater advantage of the expertise and experience the City of London is able to offer them in the field of international financial services.

Clergy (Terms of Employment)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the interim report of the McClean review of clergy terms of service in relation to section 23 of the Employment Relations Act 1999; when she expects to receive the final report; and if she will make a statement. [126831]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Department is currently studying the interim report and I look forward to receiving the final report. I understand that the Working Group is looking to produce the final report towards the end of next year.

Company Directors

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 10 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 569–70W, on company directors, what procedures are in place for ensuring that company directors who have been disqualified *(a)* do not take part as directors and *(b)* are not involved in the management of companies during the disqualification period; and if she will list the number of directors who have been discovered to have been in breach of disqualification orders in each year since 1997. [126757]

Mr. Sutcliffe: When a director is disqualified, that individual is advised of the provisions of section 13 of the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, which states that it is an offence for a person to act in contravention of a Disqualification Order.

The Insolvency Service operates the disqualified directors hotline for the receipt of complaints from members of the public concerning disqualified directors and bankrupts who may be acting in the management of a company in breach of their disqualification orders and undertakings or a bankruptcy order. Additional complaints are also received from the DTI's Companies Investigation Branch, Official Receivers and other Government Departments. Liquidators also have an obligation to report matters of a criminal nature, such as a contravention of section 13, to the Insolvency Service.

Additionally, the sub poena section of Companies House checks new directors appointments against the list of disqualified directors and advises the Insolvency Service of any potential breaches.

Section 11 and section 13 Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986

Details of prosecutions of individuals for breach of section 11/13 CDDA in each year since 1997. The information is contained in Table D2 of the companies annual report published by the Department.

The figures include only those offences prosecuted by this Department. There are likely to be section 11/13 offences prosecuted by other prosecuting authorities (for example, the CPS and the SFO). We have no information on the number of such cases.

1 April to 31 March	*Prosecutions (number of offences)*	*Convictions*	*Acquittal/ other disposal*
1997–98	112	86	26
1998–99	169	117	52
1999–2000	109	79	30
2000–01	136	119	17
2001–02	174	135	39
2002–03	141	118	23

Council of Ministers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on (1) how many occasions since May 1997 the Department's vote in the Council of Ministers against a legislative proposal *(a)* was and *(b)* was not sufficient to achieve with other member states a blocking minority; [117208]

(2) on how many occasions since May 1997 the Department abstained in the Council of Ministers on a legislative proposal which was passed by qualified majority voting; [117223]

(3) on how many occasions since May 1997 the Department has been outvoted by qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers; and if she will list the legislation by year; [117247]

(4) on how many occasions since May 1997 the Department indicated dissent from a proposal in the Council of Ministers but did not register a vote or abstention. [117260]

Ms Hewitt: It is not possible to identify these occasions when a blocking minority has been assembled against a proposal in the Council of Ministers; it is agreement that triggers the recording of a vote. For the same reason it is not possible to identify these occasions when the UK indicated dissent without abstaining or voting against the proposal.

It is good practice for the UK to work closely with the other member states and the Commission to influence and have our views taken into account prior to any vote at the Council of Ministers.

Credit Card Industry

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will review the practice of differential charging structures for credit card cheque books as part of the review of the Consumer Credit Act 1974; [116718]

(2) if her Department will ban the issuing of unsolicited credit card cheque books as part of its review of the Consumer Credit Act 1974. [116719]

Mr. Sutcliffe: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson) gave him on 5 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 531–32W. However I should emphasise that I believe that the practice of sending unsolicited credit card cheques should be discouraged but that this issue should be addressed by the credit industry changing its codes of practice rather than by regulation.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has for redeployment of members of her Department out of London and the South East. [125362]

Ms Hewitt: The scope for relocating Government activity is being considered by Sir Michael Lyons. His independent review was announced in the Chancellor's budget statement on 9 April.

Details of the review, including the consultation launched on 19 June, can be found on the HM Treasury website at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk Sir Michael will report his findings on the scope for relocating Departments and other public sector bodies before the end of the year.

Deregulation

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the deregulation measures enacted since 1997. [126071]

Ms Hewitt: The Government are committed to removing unnecessary regulatory burdens on business. This commitment is shown through the Regulatory Reform Action Plan, which includes over 250 reforms, with 25 of these being from the DTI. They include:

the recently enacted Communications Act, which replaces five existing regulators with a single regulator;

the Enterprise Act, involving insolvency reform, which will lead to significant improvements for business; and

abolition of the 20 Partner Limit.

We are also committed to ensuring new domestic employment legislation is introduced on just two dates a year.

In addition, of the 300 recommendations to Government in the 25 major reports from the Better Regulation Taskforce, we have accepted in full or in part all but 10 recommendations. We continue to identify further areas for action.

Economic Partnership Agreements

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the likely impact of economic partnership agreements signed between the European Union and southern African countries on the economies of African, Caribbean and Pacific states. [126258]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Department has not yet made an assessment of the likely impact of economic partnership agreements (EPAs) signed between the European Union (EU) and southern African countries on the economies of ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) states.

Negotiations of EPAs began in September 2002. As part of these negotiations, each ACP state is required to decide with which regional organisation it wishes to enter into an EPA with the EU; many ACP states are still in the process of exploring the options available to them. Any assessment of the likely impact of EPAs signed between the EU and southern African countries on the economies of ACP states will need to consider the resulting geographical configurations.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the EU directives implemented by the Department since 8 June 2001. [126588]

Jacqui Smith: Between 8 June 2001 and April 2002, my Department implemented the following two EU Directives:

Number	*Title/subject matter*
Directive 96/29	Laying down basic safety standards for the protection of the health of workers and the general public concerning the dangers arising from ionising radiation.
Directive 97/80	On the burden of proof in cases of discrimination based on sex

For those EU Directives implemented between April 2002 and April 2003, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 28 April 2003, *Official Report*, columns 178–79.

Since April 2003, my Department implemented the following two EU Directives:

Number	*Title/subject matter*
Directive 2000/34	Amending Council Directive 93/104 concerning certain aspects of the organisation of working time to cover sectors and activities excluded from that Directive.
Directive 2000/78	Establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation

EU Regulations

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many regulations originating from the EU have been implemented by her Department over each of the last five years. [120817]

Ms Hewitt: Regulations are, in general, directly applicable in the member states, without the need for implementation in national law. Figures for those which fall within this Department's area of responsibility are not held centrally.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe on 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 64–65 W which gives estimates for the total number of EC, ECSC and Eurotom Regulations.

Euro

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment the Government have made of the impact on employment of membership of the single European currency, on each region, by Standard Industrial Classification. [125424]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to "UK membership of the single currency: An assessment of the five economic tests" (Cm 5776) and the EMU study "EMU and business sectors", which were published on 9 June 2003.

European Working Groups

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with achieving transparency in respect of the European working groups for which the Department is responsible. [105733]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Government have long been committed to greater openness in the EU Institutions. This was a key theme of the UK Presidencies in 1992 and 1998. Making it easier to gain access to non-sensitive documents is crucial to this. The Government welcomed Regulation 1049/2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents. As a result, more documents are released to the public, while genuinely sensitive documents are given the protection they need.

Much of the Council's work takes place in preparatory bodies, including working groups. Accountability and transparency of Council business to Parliament are ensured by the scrutiny process, to which the Government are also firmly committed.

We strongly supported the measures agreed at the Seville European Council to make the Council more open when in legislating mode. We remain committed to increasing transparency. The Future of Europe Convention is also looking at ways to make the EU more open.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 9 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 626W, regarding the three cases in which covenants and other conditions relating to environmental and social impacts were included, what *(a)* host country legislation and *(b)* international environmental standard requirements which the Export Credits Guarantee Department stipulated that the relevant projects, goods or services had to comply with to ensure cover was provided. [126087]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Taking each of the projects listed in the answer of 9 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 626W in turn:

Nigeria LNG Plus

All the participating Export Credit Agencies (ECAs) insisted that covenants were inserted which committed the project to comply with the environmental laws of Nigeria and the environmental guidelines and standards of the World Bank Group and the African Development Bank. In addition, a detailed Environmental and Social Management Plan agreed by ECGD, the participating EGAs and the African Development Bank committed the company to a range of project-specific standards and mitigation measures.

Marlim Sul Oilfield, Brazil

Covenants committed the company to implementing the standards and recommendations set out in the Environmental Impact Assessment and to compliance with Brazilian environmental laws (which we consider to be more stringent than those of the World Bank Group).

Offshore exploration drilling, Brazil

The covenants required the company to regularly provide evidence that it had obtained all relevant environmental permits from the Brazilian authorities, and to notify ECGD of any material environmental incidents.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 13 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 1103W, excepting host country legislation, whether there are international environmental standard requirements which the Export Credits Guarantee Department makes requisite for every application if it is to be awarded cover. [126088]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: ECGD has, since 2001, sought to ensure that all the civil, non-aerospace cases it supports comply with relevant World Bank Group environmental guidelines and policies.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications deemed to have high potential impact the Export Credits Guarantee Department has *(a)* received and *(b)* refused cover for; and what the project type was of those applications (i) received and (ii) refused. [126110]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information is as follows:

(a) ECGD has received 12 applications relating to projects deemed to have high potential impacts. Of these, six are oil and gas projects, four involve power distribution or generation, one is a steel project and one is a bridge.

(b) None of these applications has been refused cover. Two have been approved and both were in the oil and gas sector. The others are either still being assessed or have not progressed because the UK exporter did not win the contract.

Vincent Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 25 June, *Official Report*, column 798W, on the Export Credit Guarantees Department, if she will list, for each country, the amounts *(a)* which relate to military and defence products, contracts or services and *(b)* which do not. [125930]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The amounts are detailed by country and split between defence and non-defence in the tables (which have been placed in the Library) by reference to ECGD's exposure as at 30 June 2003. Given the way ECGD's records are held it is not possible to split claims outstanding for recovery in respect of Account 1 (pre-1992 business) between defence and non-defence nor amounts in respect of moratorium interest accrued on claims paid.

Flexible Working

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the introduction of employment legislation covering working time and temporary workers is affecting the ability of the manufacturing industry to act flexibly. [116572]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The UK is in favour of legislation to provide minimum standards of employment protection, but is keen to maintain the flexibility our individual labour market requires, and which many individual workers prefer. Last year, we implemented new rights for employees on fixed-term contracts in a way that provides a high level of protection for these employees, without unnecessarily reducing employers' flexibility to use fixed-term contracts. We must allow workers choice as well as protection. The proposed Directive on temporary agency work is currently being considered by the European Council of Ministers. The Directive would not need to be implemented in the UK unless and until it is adopted. The Government are keenly aware of the potential impact on UK agencies and agency workers of a Directive that takes no account of conditions in the UK labour market. We are therefore pressing very hard for the UK's legitimate concerns to be recognised.

Information Technology

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what major IT projects with a value in excess of £10,000 she authorised expenditure on in each of the last three financial years. [125719]

Ms Hewitt: My Department manages its major IT projects through the provision of centrally managed corporate projects aimed at benefiting the whole Department and through delegated arrangements for locally driven projects, where the overall costs and benefits may be quite small and specific to that work area. Records about all major IT projects with a value in excess of £10,000 are held centrally and a list of these for each of the last three financial years is as follows.

Financial Year 2000–01

Calipsoe—Personnel System
OIELS—Export Licensing
SIELS—Export Licensing
Penserver—Pensions Administration System
Remote Access to ELGAR
Matrix—Electronic Records and Document Management System
Senior Staff Management Service
BTI Gateway/Ourplace Web Services
Redundancy Payments—Case Handling System
Secure GSI Network
Quarterly Fuel Index/Domestic Fuels Enquiry System

Financial Year 2001–02

Licensing and Consents Unit—Application Support Service
Hermes—Prosecution Case Management System
IBIS—Company Investigation Case Handling System
BTI CRM—Customer First

Financial Year 2002–03

Mentor—Departmental Accounts System
Cameo Project—Insolvency Service Banking Project
Local Intranet Service
BTI Portal Web
OMIS
Database Promotional Schemes
E. Purchasing
Business Support Transformation Service

Financial Year 2003–04

DTI Joint Web Content Management Service
Licensing and Consents Unit—Development Infrastructure.

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much the Department spent on IT *(a)* software, *(b)* hardware, *(c)* maintenance and *(d)* licences in 2002–03. [124418]

Ms Hewitt: The Department of Trade and Industry spent £21.3 million on information technology in 2002–03. A full break down as requested is not available but this spend can be classified as follows:

	£ million
Software/licences	0.4
Hardware	0.9
Maintenance	3.8
Services	16.2

Insolvency Act

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cases of offences for *(a)* wrongful trading and *(b)* fraudulent trading under the Insolvency Act 1986 have been referred for prosecution by the Official Receiver in each year since 1997; and how many of these cases have resulted in successful prosecution in each year. [126657]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The information is as follows:

(a) Wrongful trading is not a criminal offence.

(b) Fraudulent trading under the Insolvency Act 1986 is not a criminal offence.

Both *(a)* and *(b)* are civil matters dealt with by a court on the application of a liquidator seeking a civil liability on an individual. As they both provide civil remedies, Official Receivers do not refer such matters for prosecution.

Official Receivers do report alleged Fraudulent Trading offences under the Companies Act 1985. The number of convictions in respect of such offence reported by Official Receivers since 1997 have been.

	Number
1997	25
1998	9
1999	11
2000	11
2001	30
2002	14

The above figures are for the calendar year starting on 1 January 1997.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by her Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if she will make a statement. [126203]

Ms Hewitt: Only one outsourced IT contract has been signed by my Department since 1997 and this was in 1999 for the ELGAR PFI contract between DTI and a consortium known as UNITAS, (consisting of Fujitsu Services in conjunction with LogicaCMG).

The overall value of this over the 15-year life cycle of the contract is estimated at £579 million for the provision of a large range of IT services across the Department.

This contract is still in place, has 11 years still to run and has not been renegotiated to-date. Specific new services provided will have been negotiated during the first four years of the PFI deal but within the terms of the existing contract.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of UK mobile phone users are *(a)* contract pay customers and *(b)* pre-pay customers. [126894]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter for the Director General of Telecommunications, and I understand he will be writing to my hon. Friend setting out what information he collects in this regard.

New Electricity Trading Arrangements

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by how much energy production from *(a)* renewable sources, *(b)* wind and *(c)* combined heat and power has changed for each year since the introduction of New Electricity Trading Arrangements. [126719]

Mr. Timms: Electricity generation in the UK from these sources in 2000 (the year before NETA was introduced in England and Wales), 2001 (the year in which NETA was introduced) and 2002 are shown in the following table:

GWh

	2000	*2001*	*2002*
Electricity generation from all renewable sources[1]	10,383	10,077	11,444
of which generation from wind	947	967	1,259
Generation from CHP[2]	26,539	22,568	24,236

[1] Includes generation from large-scale hydro stations and from biodegradable and non-biodegradable wastes.
[2] Detailed CHP statistics for 2002 are to be published on Thursday 31 July 2003 in the Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics, 2003

Post Office Card Account

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of benefit recipients in *(a)* Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* the North East and *(d)* the UK have (i) applied for and (ii) opened Post Office Card Accounts. [125729]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the format requested. National figures only are available.

A report containing Department of Work and Pensions figures for the number of clients opting for a Post Office card account, broken down by client group up to 27 June 2003, is available in the Libraries of the House.

I understand from Post Office Ltd. that by 4 July 2003, 20,000 Post Office card accounts had been opened. This figure is not broken down by category of benefit recipient. The number of Post Office card accounts should grow rapidly over the coming weeks and months as those people opting for a card account complete the application process.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the statement of 14 July 2003, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column 621, by the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Lord Sainsbury, on Post Office card account users, what the Government's current estimate is of the number of users; and if she will make a statement. [126907]

Mr. Timms: The migration to Direct Payment is at a very early stage and the figures are volatile, but, based on customer choices so far, the Government now expect the eventual number of Post Office card accounts to be in excess of our 3 million operating assumption. A

report containing Department of Work and Pensions conversion figures up to 27 June 2003 is available in the Libraries of the House.

Productivity

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department is taking to improve productivity growth rates. [123329]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's approach to raising productivity centres on maintaining macroeconomic stability to allow firms and individuals to invest for the future, as well as implementing microeconomic reforms to remove the barriers which prevent markets from functioning efficiently. The Government are addressing historic microeconomic weaknesses in five areas that drive productivity growth—investment, innovation, skills, enterprise and competitive markets.

Following the recent review of DTI structure and priorities, the Department has been reorganised in order to put productivity and competitiveness at the heart of our activities. The Department's mission, reflecting the Government's five drivers, is centred on the three objectives of world-class science and innovation, successful business and fair markets. In order to enhance the DTI's capacity to achieve these goals, we are currently working to develop a new strategy. This strategy will set out our longer-term direction; allow us to meet the expectations of our key stakeholders and guide the annual business planning process. The strategy will make the maximum use of the evidence base to inform both policy and delivery.

The DTI has already initiated a number of measures which are intended to help drive up productivity. These include:

publishing the first Manufacturing Strategy for thirty years and launching the Manufacturing Advisory Service;

working in conjunction with the Department For Education and Skills, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Treasury to produce the recent Skills Strategy White Paper, which contains measures to improve the skills of Britain's work force;

introducing the Enterprise Act 2002, which will make UK competition and insolvency regimes amongst the best in the world according to independent observers;

increasing funding for science, engineering and technology from £8.46 billion in 2002–03 to £8.61 billion in 2004–05 in real terms. This includes £1 billion investment in the research infrastructure;

levering in £330 million extra capital to small firms through the Regional Venture Capital Funds;

announcing a review of innovation policy that will set out a strategy for improving innovation performance in the UK. The findings of the review will be published later this year.

Radiation

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had on a review of the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation guidelines and the Trower report. [124956]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* I have been asked to reply.

ICNIRP is an international body of independent scientific experts which publishes health and safety guidelines on exposure to ultraviolet, optical, electromagnetic and ultrasound radiation. There are no plans at present to review ICNIRP guidelines on electromagnetic radiation. No discussions have been held with the UK Government on this matter.

In 2001, Mr. B Trower made available to the Police Federation a report he had written about the health and safety aspects of the TETRA mobile radio technology. The Home Secretary discussed the report with the Police Federation and provided a response based on expert advice from the National Radiological Protection Board's independent Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation.

Redundancies

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many notified redundancies there have been in each year since 1997 among *(a)* 18 to 24, *(b)* 25 to 35, *(c)* 36 to 54 and *(d)* over 54-year-olds; what these figures represent as a percentage of the total work force, broken down by region; and if she will make a statement, [124539]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The information about proposed redundancies notified to this Department does not identify the ages of the workers concerned.

Regional Science Councils

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to create more regional science councils. [124118]

Ms Hewitt: Regional Science Councils or similar bodies are created by the regions themselves and not by central Government. However, the Government have consistently commended the board model of such councils. Most recently—as announced in the Budget statement in April—I have asked Sir Tom McKillop—in his capacity as Chair of the North West Science Council—to lead a network to ensure that best practice in promoting innovation and knowledge transfer is exchanged, and that models of Science and Industry Councils come into operation in every region as soon as practicable.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has for renewable energy schemes that will benefit the West Midlands. [126311]

Mr. Timms: With DTI support the Government Office for the West Midlands is working with local government and private sector partners to promote and

support the development of renewable energy in the region. A number of renewable energy schemes are already under way. These include:

Under the Large Scale Field Trial Scheme, the DTI has supported the installation of Solar PV stands at the National Indoor Athletics Training Centre at the Alexander Stadium. This will provide 107 KWP rating surplus energy into the grid.

Other projects will follow under the Major PV Demonstration programme.

Two schemes were successfully completed in the 1st Round of Clear Skies Community Funding grants; One for solar thermal panels on a new build for Housing Association at Craven Arms, Shropshire and the installation of a biomass boiler at the National Trust supplying estate offices in Bridworth, Shropshire.

Three Waste incineration projects at Birmingham, Stoke and Coventry with total operating capacity of 60MW

A 25MW operating capacity landfill gas project at Packington

A sewage gas site at Minworth in Birmingham operated by Severn Trent Water

Small scale hydro schemes at Oswestry and Tamworth

In addition, DEFRA officials are working with project developers setting up biomass heating and power generation projects in the West Midlands under the DTFs New Opportunities Funds Bio-Energy Capital grants Scheme.

Research and Development

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been spent on research and development in current prices in each year since 1997–98; and what her plans are for each year until 2005–06. [125590]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the written ministerial statement I made on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 46WS.

The figures in Forward Look 2003 extend to 2004–05. Corresponding figures for 2005–06 are not yet available. However, plans for the Science Budget up to 2005–06 are set out in the DTI OST document 'Science Budget 2003–04 to 2005–06' a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House.

Smoking

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on employers providing smoking breaks in smoke-free workplaces. [126837]

Mr. Sutcliffe: There is no statutory entitlement to receive smoking breaks in any workplace. However, the Working Time Regulations provide workers with a 20-minute in work rest break if they work for more than six hours at a stretch. Young workers are entitled a 30-minute in work rest break if they work for more than four and a half hours at a stretch. There are no plans to amend the Working Time Regulations to require employers to provide smoking breaks in smoke-free workplaces.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [126672]

Ms Hewitt: Between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003, Departmental special adviser have travelled abroad in an official capacity four times, on all occasions accompanying the Secretary of State.' On three occasions to Brussels at an average cost of £463 per visit, and on one occasion to the USA at no cost to the Department.

Date	*Place visited*	
19–20 June 2002	Brussels	1 special adviser
26 November 2002	Brussels	1 special adviser
3 March 2003	Brussels	1 special adviser
28 July 2002–1 August 2002	USA	1 special adviser

All travel by the special advisers was undertaken in accordance with the guidance set out in the Ministerial code and the Civil Service management code.

Tariff Barriers

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research she has commissioned on the costs of administering tariff barriers, broken down by *(a)* country and *(b)* major category of product. [125080]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No independent research has been commissioned on this although officials will make assessments of the impact of particular proposals from time to time.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many planning applications have been made to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department. [124813]

Ms Hewitt: Since August 2001 when the current planning regulations on mobile telecommunications masts came into force there have been eight planning applications and six applications for prior approval to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department.

Wind Farms

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what briefing was provided by her Department's Press Office to the media in advance of her announcement on 14 July on the expansion of offshore wind capacity. [126319]

Ms Hewitt: Invitations to a press briefing were issued to media representatives in advance of the announcement on the expansion of offshore wind capacity on 14 July. No other briefing material was released in advance of the announcement.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether wind farms built on unpopulated islands and islands with populations of less than 1,000 people are entitled to support under the offshore wind capital grants programme. [126779]

Mr. Timms: Wind farms built on islands would not be entitled to support under the offshore wind capital grants programme, as such wind farms are considered onshore rather than offshore.

Onshore wind farms are not eligible for capital grants, since onshore wind is close to becoming commercially competitive. However, onshore wind farms (wherever situated) would be eligible for support under the Renewables Obligations.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

EU Institutions (Visits)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Leader of the House pursuant to his answer of 15 July 2003, ref 124996, how many visits were made by hon. Members to each venue. [126909]

Mr. Hain: The number of visits made by hon. Members to each location in 2002–03 were as follows:

Location	*Visits*
Ankara	3
Athens	5
Berlin	15
Brussels	85
Bucharest	4
Budapest	1
Copenhagen	2
Dublin	10
Helsinki	1
Lisbon	2
Madrid	14
Nicosia	5
Paris	15
Prague	9
Riga	1
Rome	10
Sofia	2
Stockholm	6
Strasbourg	14
The Hague	9
Valetta	1
Vienna	1
Warsaw	3
Total visits made	218

Pre-legislative Scrutiny

Mr. Allen: To ask the Leader of the House which departmental select committee chairmen he has met to discuss pre-legislation scrutiny by their committees. [126869]

Mr. Hain: I have not met any departmental select committee chairmen to discuss pre-legislative scrutiny by their committees and have no plans to do so.

I have met the Chairman of the Liaison Committee to discuss pre-legislative scrutiny, among other matters, and I hope to meet the members of the Liaison Committee in the autumn. The Government seek to facilitate pre-legislative scrutiny as far as is possible and has placed great emphasis on producing more bills in draft. However, the way in which committees perform their core duties is a matter for Parliament, not Government.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Leader of the House pursuant to his answer of 15 July, ref 124976, if he will list the ways in which each of the Bills was scrutinised; and if he will make a statement. [126910]

Mr. Hain: The following information requested is as follows: nine draft bills were laid before Parliament this Session. The table indicates in each case the Committee which has undertaken, or will undertake, pre-legislative scrutiny.

Draft Bill	*Pre-legislative scrutiny by*
Electricity (Trading and Transmission)	Trade and Industry Committee
Corruption	Joint Committee on the draft Corruption Bill
Housing	Committee on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Public Audit (Wales)	Welsh Affairs Committee (and the National Assembly for Wales)
Civil Contingencies	Joint Committee on the draft Civil Contingencies Bill
Nuclear Sites and Radioactive Substances	Trade and Industry Committee
Mental Incapacity	Joint Committee on the draft Mental Incapacity Bill
Gender Recognition	Joint Committee on Human Rights
Gambling (part 1)	Joint Committee on the draft Gambling Bill

Special Advisers

Mr. Flight: To ask the Leader of the House how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* press officers, *(c)* civil servants, *(d)* advisers to civil servants and *(e)* permanent staff were working for the Leader of the House in each year since 1996. [126470]

Mr. Hain: The information requested, where available, is as follows and includes staff working in both the Office of the Leader and Deputy Leader:

From	*Civil servants*	*Special advisers*	*Press officers*
May 1997	6	1	—
June 1997	7	1	—
March 1998	8	2	—
November 1999	10	2	—
August 2000	11	2	1
November 2002	12	2	2

The post of Deputy Leader of the House of Commons was created in July 1999.

The Press Officers working for the Leader and Deputy Leader are employed by the Cabinet Office.

All the civil servants working in the offices of the Leader and Deputy Leader have permanent status, though all except one are on loan from other Departments.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Leader of the House how many written ministerial statements have been made by his Office since 29 October 2002. [126603]

Mr. Hain: Two.

TRANSPORT

Listed Buildings

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* Grade I, *(b)* Grade II* and *(c)* Grade II buildings have been identified for demolition as a result of his response to the 11 multi modal studies announced on 9 July; and where they are located. [126695]

Mr. Jamieson: There are no Grade I or Grade II* listed buildings identified for demolition due to road schemes that entered the Targeted Programme of Improvements on 9 July. The Grade II Burgess Hill Farmhouse and Barn are on the proposed route of the A21 dualling between Tonbridge and Pembury. No decision has been taken on whether to demolish or relocate these buildings.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much London Underground Ltd. spent on *(a)* advertising and *(b)* public relations in each of the last six years. [126554]

Mr. McNulty: Due to organisational changes in 1999 (London Transport becoming part of Transport for London, and restructuring of London Underground to reflect "shadowing running" in anticipation of the Public Private Partnership), it is only possible to provide comparable figures over the last three years.

	Advertising & Customer Information (£ million)	*Public Relations (£ million)*
2002–03	8.4	1.3
2001–02	7.8	1.6
2000–01	8.4	1.1

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many prosecutions of London Underground Ltd. there were in each of the last six years for breaches of health and safety regulations. [126555]

Mr. McNulty: This information is freely available on Health and Safety Executive's Website, www.hse.gov.uk. The number of prosecutions against London Underground for health and safety breaches over the last six years is as follows:

	Number
1996	0
1998	0
1999	1
2000	0
2001	3
2002	0

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) at what frequency each London Underground station was cleaned on 14 July; [126557]

(2) how often trains were cleaned on each London Underground line on average in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and how many trains ran on each line in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [126578]

Mr. McNulty: The information is not available in the format requested. LU has strict guidelines about station and train cleanliness and they form a key part of the PPP contracts. London Underground are working very closely with their Infraco partners to achieve improvements. The PPP contracts sets benchmarks for performance and Infracos have incentives to achieve these or suffer financial penalties for failure.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many London Underground *(a)* staff and *(b)* contractors were employed to clean (i) stations and (ii) trains on 14 July. [126626]

Mr. McNulty: Station and train cleanliness are a key element of the PPP contracts. Therefore, the responsibility for employing staff to clean trains and stations is the responsibility of each of LU's Infraco partners. The number of cleaners employed is a matter for them.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many London Underground train carriages were available for use on each underground line on 14 July. [126627]

Mr. McNulty: The number of train carriages available for service on each Underground line on 14 July, during the evening peak (18.00) was as follows:

Line	*Carriages in service*
Bakerloo	210
Central	520
Victoria	288
Waterloo & City	16
Jubilee	246
Northern	522
Piccadilly	360
Metropolitan	336
Circle	72
Hammersmith & City	84
East London	24
District	456
Total LU	3,134

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many miles of track London Underground was operating passenger services on 14 July broken down by line. [126629]

Mr. McNulty: The following table, shows miles of track by line. The figures exclude depots and sidings, but include National Rail tracks over which LU operates passenger services:

Line	*Miles*
Bakerloo	29.7
Central	91.3
Victoria	27.7
Waterloo & City	2.8
Jubilee	48.4
Northern	75.5
Piccadilly	68.0
Metropolitan Hammersmith & City	106.6
East London	9.0
District	78.9
Total	538.0

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what the average temperature during the summer period was on each of the London Underground lines in 2002; [126630]

(2) what the maximum temperature reached was on each of the London Underground lines in the last 12 months. [126633]

Mr. McNulty: London Underground does not hold such data in the format requested.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many London Underground stations were covered by CCTV systems on 14 July. [126631]

Mr. McNulty: London Underground, for reasons of security, do not publicly disclose the number of stations with CCTV coverage. They can confirm that 96 per cent. of stations possess CCTV facilities. Under the PPP, improving security of customers and staff is a key priority and LU and their partners are committed to delivering these improvements.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much litter was collected on each underground line in the last 12 months. [126632]

Mr. McNulty: Data are not available in the format requested. However, LU estimates that approximately 15 tonnes of litter is removed from trains and stations every day.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* lowest and *(b)* highest salary was for London Underground (i) station staff, (ii) drivers and (iii) board members on 14 July 2003. [126641]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is set out in the following table:

£

	Lowest Salary	*Highest Salary*
Station staff (From Customer Service Assistant to Station Supervisor)	18,932	34,044
Train Operators (drivers)[1]	31,274	31,274
London Underground Board Members	98,291	154,500

[1] Train operators are paid at a flat rate

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many London Underground stations were fully accessible to people with disabilities on 14 July. [126642]

Mr. McNulty: There were currently 39 stations served by London Underground on 14 July with step-free access to their platforms. Train Operating Companies manage nine of these stations.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* lowest and *(b)* highest (i) single and (ii) return fares were on the London Underground on 14 July. [126643]

Mr. McNulty: Setting of Underground fares has been an operational responsibility for Transport for London and the Mayor of London since the summer of 2000. The cheapest adult tickets on London Underground are (i) 1.00 single and (ii) 2.00 return. The most expensive adult tickets they sell are (i) £3.70 single and (ii) £7.40 return.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* lowest priced and *(b)* highest priced (i) monthly and (ii) annual season ticket was on the London Underground on 14 July. [126644]

Mr. McNulty: Setting of Underground fares has been an operational responsibility for Transport for London and the Mayor of London since the summer of 2000. The cheapest adult season tickets on London Underground are (i) 35 monthly and (ii) 364 annual. The most expensive adult season tickets they sell are (i) £142.90 monthly and (ii) £1,488 annual. The cheapest monthly and annual season tickets cover only one Travelcard Zone (a choice of zones 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 but not 1). The most expensive monthly and annual season tickets cover all Zones (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6).

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* earliest and *(b)* latest train running times were on each London Underground line on 14 July. [126645]

Mr. McNulty: The earliest and latest running times from Monday to Friday were as follows:

	Earliest train	*Latest train*
Bakerloo	05.38	00.50
Central	05.12	01.09
Circle	05.12	01.09
District	04.56	01.28
East London	05.24	01.13
Hammersmith and City	04.40	00.59
Jubilee	05.12	01.13
Metropolitan	05.22	01.30
Northern	05.13	01.12
Piccadilly	05.10	01.16
Victoria	05.20	01.02
Waterloo and City	06.15	21.52

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average waiting time at London Underground ticket offices was in the four weeks before 14 July. [126646]

Mr. McNulty: According to London Underground's latest figures, (four weeks to 21 June) the average waiting time at ticket offices was 66.4 seconds. This is the lowest average waiting time attained for four years.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many acts of aggression against staff there were on each London Underground line in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [126647]

Mr. McNulty: Following a major programme aimed at improving staff protection, physical assaults fell by 4 per cent. in 2002–03, the first time in many years. The figures requested are provided as follows.

Line	*Instances of aggression*
Bakerloo	46
Central	123
District Line	189
East London	10
Jubilee	148
Circle and Hammersmith	14
Metropolitan	233
Northern	183
Piccadilly	163
Victoria	64
Total	1,173

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much revenue was raised through London Underground fares in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [126648]

Mr. McNulty: For 2002–03, total fares that London Underground earned for carrying passengers on its network was 1,108.5 million.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many London Underground employees there were on 14 July, broken down by *(a)* train drivers, *(b)* station staff, *(c)* HQ staff and *(d)* other categories of staff. [126649]

Mr. McNulty: The following data include permanent staff and those on fixed term contracts but exclude agency staff:

	Number
Train operators (drivers)	3,189
Station staff	6,164
HQ staff (Central Directorates)	1,668
Other categories of staff[1]	2,045
Total	13,066

[1] Personnel supporting train operators and station staff in the Trains and Stations Directorates.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* train cancellations and *(b)* delays of more than 10 minutes to London Underground train services there were on each line in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [126650]

Mr. McNulty: The following data cover July 2002–June 2003.

Line	*Delays greater than 15 minutes*	*Peak cancellations*
Bakerloo	342	926
Central	288	9,435
Victoria	149	572
Waterloo and City	79	254
Jubilee	247	600
Northern	259	1,309
Piccadilly	409	2,546
Metropolitan	554	1,260
Circle and Hammersmith	289	1,743
East London	90	107
District	567	1,421
Total	3,273	20,173

Notes:

1. Cancellation figures given are for M-F peaks (09:00 and 18:00 'snapshots').

2. London Underground's key performance indicator for delays is based on 15 minutes

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the level of fare evasion was on the London Underground in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and how many people were prosecuted for fare evasion on each line during that period. [126651]

Mr. McNulty: In the 12 months to November 2002, 3.54 per cent. of passengers were unable to produce a ticket, or carried an incorrect ticket. Between 1 July 2002–1 July 2003, LU submitted 2,042 prosecutions for fare evasion. LU carries out regular ticket irregularity surveys, and not all instances of passengers using incorrect tickets are an attempt to avoid paying the correct fare.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average number of passengers carried at peak times on each London Underground line was during the last 12 months for which figures are available. [126652]

Mr. McNulty: The following figures show the average number of passengers travelling in peak times during a typical week in 2002:

	7am-10am	*4pm-7pm*
Bakerloo	83,370	91,470
Central	170,229	184,227
District	178,250	169,945
East London	10,737	10,207
Jubilee	126,286	125,316
Hammersmith and City	44,570	395
Metropolitan	73,036	67,385
Northern	202,105	192,946
Piccadilly	134,526	156,320
Victoria	149,728	157,418
Circle	58,489	63,843
Waterloo and City	17,806	14,577

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Disabled Children (Family Support)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many families with *(a)* severely disabled and *(b)* disabled children have

received family support in each year since 1997, broken down by social services authority; and if he will make a statement: [124164]

(2) what the net expenditure of each social services authority in England on family support services for (*a*) severely disabled and (*b*) disabled children was in each year since 1997; what the total was for all authorities in each of those years; what the percentage change in real terms was in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [124165]

Margaret Hodge: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Learning Disabilities (Support)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many children with a learning disability received support from social services; what the net expenditure was of each social services authority in England on those children in each year since 1997–98; and what the total was for all authorities in those years; [126924]

(2) what the net expenditure of each social services authority in England on disabled children was in each year since 1997–98; and what the percentage change was in each year since 1997–98. [126925]

Margaret Hodge: The only information available relates to a survey week in September/October 2001. The results are published in "CIN 2001 Local Authority tables: Results of a survey of activity and expenditure as reported by Local Authorities in England based on a survey in September/October 2001". The publication is available at http://www.doh.gov.uk/cin/cin2001latables.htm.

Table J shows the number of disabled children reported in the Children in Need (CIN) Census in the survey week who received a service during that week. The results are shown by local authority. The information cannot be broken down to distinguish those who have a learning disability from others.

On expenditure on learning disabled children/disabled children receiving social services during a census week in September/October 2001, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 21 July.

Adult Learning Programmes

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the national indicative budget for non-qualification bearing adult learning programmes will be introduced. [126786]

Alan Johnson: The national indicative budget for non-qualification bearing adult learning programmes will be introduced from the 2004/05 academic year.

Advice Partnerships/Helpline

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements he will make for (*a*) governance and (*b*) funding of the combined local advice partnerships and national advice helpline. [126801]

Margaret Hodge: The Learning & Skills Council and Ufi/learndirect will work together to integrate the learndirect national advice service with the work of the local information, advice and guidance partnerships. All funding for the Ufi/learndirect national advice service and local services will be channelled through the Learning and Skills Council, supporting consistent planning and monitoring of services nationally and locally.

Centres of Vocational Excellence

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the development of centres of vocational excellence. [126782]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Government has established more than 250 Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) to date. We have met the manifesto commitment 8 months early and we are well on our way to meet our target of 400 CoVEs by March 2006.

Chapter 6 of the skills strategy, "Realising our Potential" published by my Department on 9 July includes our plans for further development of the CoVE network.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what mechanisms the Minister for Children will establish between the services transferred to the Department for Education and Skills, and the relevant services remaining in the Department of Health, to ensure the development of a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. [121240]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 23 June 2003]:* The Department of Health will continue to have responsibility for the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, and as before will continue to work in close co-operation with the Department for Education and Skills. I will be working closely with ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health to address the needs of children and young people who require co-ordinated support from health and social services, including those with mental health problems. In particular we will be collaborating closely in the development of the forthcoming Children's National service Framework, which will set out standards for delivery of health and social care services for children, and DfES and DH will continue to have joint responsibility for the development of policy on Children's Trusts.

Child Law Reform

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the Minister for Children has responsibility for child law reform. [121822]

Margaret Hodge: I will keep under review the legislation relating to children and young people for which the Department for Education and Skills is responsible and I will work with Ministers from other Departments to ensure that their legislation contributes, wherever relevant, to the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

Child Care

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether he will make the initiative announced on 17 June on improving access to affordable and quality child care available to parents in Dudley North; and if he will make a statement. [123426]

Margaret Hodge: We announced a number of initiatives on 17 June all of which will benefit parents in the Dudley North Constituency.

Funding for the "childminder buddying scheme" will be available from April 2004.

Childcare Partnership Managers are now available in each Jobcentre Plus district.

Quality First is available for childminders who wish to develop their child care capabilities.

Care to Learn is available for all teenage parents who wish to take part in publicly funded education or training.

The foundation stage information packs will be available from EYDCPs after 18 July.

New sure start guide to choosing child care is available from Daycare Trust on 0207 840 3350.

These initiatives supplement others which are available throughout the country to support our aims of providing affordable, quality child care for all parents. They include the child care element of the new working tax credit, which builds on the success of the child care tax credit to support working parents by adding greater flexibility and an extension of the range of eligible child care; and the expansion of free, part-time early years education, which is available to all 4-years-olds and will be available to all 3-year olds from April 2004. In addition, developments in out of school care including before and after school and during weekends and holidays are making a real difference for children and their families. While the focus of these clubs is care for the children outside the school day, the provision is also about positive play and learning experiences. We launched extended schools through the Education Act 2002, giving schools the powers to provide community facilities, including child care. Child care in schools provides safe, accessible child care for children attending the school and children in the wider community.

These initiatives will help break the cycles of poverty and make sure that each child has an equal opportunity to succeed at school and in later life.

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many child care places have been created in *(a)* Stoke, South constituency and *(b)* Stoke-on-Trent Unitary Authority since 1997. [125623]

Margaret Hodge: Figures on new child care places created have been collected quarterly from local authorities since April 1999. Between April 1999 and March 2003, our latest information, Stoke-on-Trent Unitary Authority reported the creation of a total of 2,148 new child care places. This includes 454 new places with childminders. Figures for constituencies are available for group-based child care provision but not for childminders; between April 1999 and March 2003 Stoke-on-Trent Unitary Authority reported the creation of 490 new group-based child care places in Stoke, South constituency.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many cases which are the responsibility of CAFCASS remain unallocated; how many of these are considered to be at high risk; and how many are in the Greater London area. [124919]

Margaret Hodge: Of 12,077 public law cases being dealt with by CAFCASS in May 2003, 511 cases were unallocated[1]. Of the 8,398 private law cases being dealt with in May 2003, 399 cases were unallocated[2]. 263 of these unallocated cases were in Greater London. Cases where there is an identified risk to children are given priority by the service, but data are not collected on the number of high risk cases it is involved in. Under the Children Act 1989, an Emergency Protection Order can be granted by a court, to safeguard children likely to suffer significant harm. These orders are granted within 24 hours of an application to the court.

[1] Unallocated seven days after a request from Court is received by CAFCASS.

[2] Unallocated less than 10 weeks before a CAFCASS report is filed at Court.

City Academies

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills who the owners of the land and buildings in a church-run city academy are; and in cases where the land and buildings are not owned by the local education authority, under what circumstances ownership would revert to the local education authority. [126184]

Mr. Miliband: Sites for academies are usually provided by local education authorities, which transfer ownership to the academies themselves, on a leasehold or freehold basis. Where an academy is sponsored by a church, however, particularly if it replaces an existing church school, the site may be provided by a religious foundation.

Our normal expectation is that the site and buildings of an academy will revert to whichever body provided the site initially, in the event they are no longer required for the purposes of the academy. Individual academy funding agreements will make specific provision for this. Where a local education authority has transferred the land or buildings to an academy trust the Secretary of State has powers to transfer the land back to the authority if the academy ceases to exist or moves to another site.

Class Sizes

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average class size in secondary schools was in *(a)* Dorset and *(b)* Poole in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [126440]

Mr. Miliband: The available information is shown in the table.

Maintained secondary schools[1] average size of classes taught by one teacher[2]

Position in January each year 1992 to 2003[5]

	Secondary Schools		
	Dorset LEA[3]	*Dorset LEA*[4]	*Pode LEA*[4]
1992	21.8	[6]—	[6]—
1993	21.4	[6]—	[6]—
1994	21.5	[6]—	[6]—
1995	21.8	[6]—	[6]—
1996	22.0	[6]—	[6]—
1997	21.8	[6]—	[6]—
1998	[6]—	22.5	20.5
1999	[6]—	22.0	20.8
2000	[6]—	22.6	21.4
2001	[6]—	22.8	20.9
2002	[6]—	22.7	20.2
2003[5]	[6]—	22.0	20.9

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.
[2] Classes as taught during a single selected period in each school on the day of the census in January.
[3] Before local government reorganisation Dorset LEA incorporated Pode LEA Bournemouth LEA and rest of Dorset.
[4] After local government reorganisation.
[5] provisional
[6] not available
Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Community Learning

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will set out arrangements for safeguarding funding for local and adult community learning. [126802]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department and the LSC will agree an overall indicative budget to support non-qualification bearing programmes previously funded under Adult and Community Learning. Nationally this will be based on the broad proportion of LSC funds spent on this type of learning. The LSC will agree with each local LSC a minimum figure for such learning activities in order to maximize the civic, social and cultural gain in every part of England.

Connexions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which wards and programmes within Sefton have benefited from *(a)* Connexions, *(b)* Connexions Summer Plus, *(c)* Transforming Youth Work Development Fund and *(d)* Lifelong Learning Partnerships. [124517]

Margaret Hodge: The information is as follows:

Connexions

Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership (which covers the whole of Sefton) opened in September 2001. Connexions offers advice, guidance and access to personal development opportunities for all young people aged 13–19 years old (or up to 25 years old if the young person has a learning difficulty or disability). Since April 2002, significant help has been given on 29,500 occasions to young people in Sefton.

Positive Activities for Young People (previously Connexions Summer Plus)

Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) is a new programme for young people, which provides diversionary activities during school holidays. This programme is being delivered by Greater Merseyside Connexions. In Sefton, 210 full-time places will be provided under PAYP from mid July this year with activities focused on the southern end of the borough.

In addition, a minimum of 60 young people will receive targeted support from key workers to ensure that they join and stay with the programme and return to education, training or employment after the holiday period.

Activities will focus on providing young people with opportunities to help them fulfil their potential, as well as diverting them away from crime. The PAYP scheme will include sport, developing skills as DJs, arts, activities promoting the cultural diversity of the area, and outdoor adventure. These will be available throughout the school holiday periods at times appropriate to meet the needs of young people.

Transforming Youth Work Development Fund

The aim of the TYWDF is to raise the overall quality and quantity of youth work. Sefton has received £48,989 from TYWDF in 2003–04. (This amount adds to the budget provided by the local authority from its education resources).

Sefton Youth Service has used some of this funding to help develop a project called 'Youth Only Zone', working with the police and Leisure services. This project focuses on tackling anti-social behaviour and street crime by young people. It gives youth workers and the police a number of options to offer young people through a range of activities provided in leisure centres. Last year, 500 young people became involved in 'Youth Only Zone' through the Youth Service. Sefton police have also reported a 20 per cent. reduction in calls about juvenile nuisance since the start of the project.

Lifelong Learning Partnerships

Lifelong Learning Partnerships bring together local learning providers (ranging from voluntary sector to Further Education/Higher Education Institutions) and others such as local government, Connexions Service, trade unions, employers and faith groups.

The Partnerships have two core roles; to promote joint working between partners in support of lifelong learning and to maximise the contribution of learning to local regeneration.

From April 2003, funding is routed through the LSC with Sefton Lifelong Learning Partnership receiving £74,512.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what has been the total money spent on the Connexions service in each year since it was established; and how many people under the age of 19 have received advice from the service in each of those years. [123568]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 4 July 2003]:* The amount spent on the Connexions service in each year since it was established is as follows:

	£ million
2000–01	12
2001–02	147
2002–03	377

Note:
These figures exclude the amount spent on funding careers services in those areas where Connexions had not yet been introduced.

Information about the number of young people under the age of 19 receiving advice from Connexions is not collected in the exact format requested. However, the following table shows the number of occasions that young people received assistance in 2001–02 and interventions in 2002–03. Different definitions were used in these two years, reflecting the move away from counting all contacts with young people (referred to as "assistance given") to recording only significant contact on a one-to-one basis (referred to as "interventions").

	England
April 2001-March 2002 "assistance given"[1]	1,257,437
April 2002-March 2003 "interventions"[2]	3,082,926

[1] Data relates to 15 Connexions partnerships which were launched before March 2002.

[2] Data relates to the 46 Connexions partnerships (including the 15 partnerships referred to above) which were operational at some point during 2002–03

County Council Support Grants

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what additional support grant for Leicestershire county council would be required if it was funded at the average for English counties for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary pupils based on the (i) current financial year and *(b)* each financial year between 1996–97 to 2002–03; [125241]

(2) how much funding has changed per pupil in real terms for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Leicestershire since 1996–97; [125242]

(3) if he will make a statement on the level of education funding in Leicestershire; and if he will estimate the *(a)* percentage and *(b)* cost difference between Leicestershire and the top funded county outside London. [125243]

Mr. Miliband: The Education Formula Spending (EPS) system, which distributes the bulk of the financial support for schools, sets out not to provide the same level of funding for all pupils but to allow for the extra costs of educating children with additional needs, those in rural areas with sparse populations and those in areas where it costs more to recruit and retain staff. Therefore there are differences in the levels of funding which authorities receive recognising the differences in circumstances. For that reason, Leicestershire receives £380 per pupil (10 per cent.) less in overall resources than the "top" funded county outside London but since 1997–98 (the last year for which comparable data are available) real terms funding in Leicestershire has increased by 620 (29 per cent.) for primary pupils and by 550 (19 per cent.) for secondary pupils. The following table sets out the other information requested in cash terms between 1997–98 and 2003–04. For 2004–05, we are working with representatives of schools and local education authorities to ensure that every school receives a reasonable per pupil settlement.

	Leicestershire (£)	*Shires (£)*	*Difference (£)*	*Grant needed (£ million)*
Primary aged pupils (3–10)				
1997–98	1,910	1,860	-50	—
1998–99	2,010	2,010	0	—
1999–2000	2,180	2,200	20	1.2
2000–01	2,380	2,400	30	1.4
2001–02	2,560	2,590	30	1.6
2002–03	2,670	2,740	70	4.1
2003–04	2,860	3,030	170	9.3
Secondary aged pupils (11–15)				
1997–98	2,540	2,600	60	2
1998–99	2,660	2,710	40	1.5
1999–00	2,810	2,880	60	2.3
2000–01	3,060	3,120	60	2.2
2001–02	3,260	3,320	60	2.3
2002–03	3,420	3,520	100	3.8
2003–04	3,520	3,710	190	7.4

Degree Qualifications

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of the *(a)* male and *(b)* female work force in (i) London and (ii) Sefton have degree-level qualifications. [124107]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The lastest available estimates from the Local Area Labour Force Survey 2001 are shown in the table.

Proportion of people of working age[1] holding qualifications at NVQ level 4 or above[2]

	Male		*Female*		*All*	
		95% confidence interval between[3]		*95% confidence interval between*		*95% confidence interval between*
London	32.0%	30.9%–33.0%	29.5%	28.5%–30.6%	30.8%	30.1%–31.6%
Sefton	21.8%	18.3%–25.4%	22.5%	18.8%–26.3%	22.2%	19.6%–24.7%
Great Britain	24.3%	24.0%–24.5%	23.1%	22.8%–23.4%	23.7%	23.5%–23.9%

[1] Working age is defined as all males aged 16–64 and females aged 16–59.

[2] NVQ level 4 or above covers postgraduates, first degrees, HNDs and other undergraduate qualifications.

[3] The confidence interval figures show in the answer indicate the potential margin or error of the data for each area, given that the LFS is a sample survey and that estimated populations for each area are therefore subject to sampling variations.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many staff the Department and each agency and non-departmental public body for which the Department is responsible had in each year since 1997; and what the cost of those staff was in each of those years. [122260]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Data on staffing levels in the Civil Service are collected from departments and agencies twice-yearly, in April and October. Headline figures are published under National Statistics guidelines via a press notice. Those for October 2002 were published on 27 February 2003.

A copy of the press notice, accompanying media brief and supporting tables is available on the world wide web at www.civil-service.gov.uk/statistics. Copies of these documents are also placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

More detailed information on the Civil Service is published annually in Civil Service Statistics, copies of which are laid in the Libraries of both Houses. The last edition, based on April 2001 data, was published in June 2002. The next edition, based on April 2002 data, is due to be published at the end of July 2003.

Staffing costs for my Department for the years in question were as follows.

	£ million
1997/98	100.43
1998/99	107.98
1999/00	116.81
2000/01	133.95
2001/02	124.12

The figures exclude the staffing costs of Departmental staff employed in and paid by Government Offices, which are not held centrally.

Cabinet Office publishes information on non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) in its annual publication Public Bodies. The information includes details of the number of staff employed by each NDPB at 31 March each year. Public Bodies 2002 was published in January 2003. Copies of Public Bodies published each year since 1997 are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Staffing costs of NDPBs for which my Department is responsible are listed in the following table:

£ million

NDPB	*1997/98*	*1998/99*	*1999/2000*	*2000/01*	*2001/02*
Adult Learning Inspectorate	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8.00
British Educational Communications and Technology Agency	2.52	2.42	2.73	3.11	3.22
Construction Industry Training Board[1]	18.71	19.98	21.15	23.21	26.73
Engineering Construction Industry Training Board[1]	1.05	1.04	1.27	1.29	1.34
Higher Education Funding Council	5.06	5.13	6.05	6.90	7.80
Investors in People UK Ltd.	0.80	0.88	1.01	1.09	1.31
Learning and Skills Council	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	135.00
National College for School Leadership	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.22
Qualifications and, Curriculum Authority	n/a	14.27	15.08	15.51	19.09
Student Loans Company	5.62	6.80	9.35	10.42	12.20
Sector Skills Development Agency	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Teacher Training Agency	2.45	2.84	3.03	3.63	5.32

[1] financial year ends 31 December
n/a—NDPB not in existence at that time.

Disabled Students

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of university students were registered disabled for courses commencing in *(a)* autumn 2000, *(b)* autumn 2001 and *(c)* autumn 2002. [117381]

Alan Johnson: The available information is only collected for UK domiciled students and is based on the student's own assessment of whether he or she has a disability and so does not necessarily indicate that the student is registered disabled.

The data for the last three available years are given in the table. Data for the academic year 2002/03 will be available from December 2003.

UK domiciled higher education students recorded as having a disability, from 1999/2000 to 2001/02

	Academic year		
	1999/2000	*2000/01*	*2001/02*
Numbers[1]			
With a disability	73,168	79,583	89,291
Without a disability	1,431,303	1,510,667	1,575,847
Unknown	100,050	53,615	34,747
Total known	1,504,471	1,590,250	1,665,138
Percentages			
With a disability	5	5	5
Without a disability	95	95	95
Total known	100	100	100

[1] Includes postgraduates and undergraduates

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

E-learning

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will publish the consultation document on the national e-learning strategy. [126791]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The consultation document Towards a Unified e-Learning Strategy' was published on Tuesday 8 July 2003. Copies of the document are available in the House of Commons Library and can also be downloaded from the website www.dfes.gov.uk/elearningstrategy.

E2E Programme

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on progress on the E2E programme. [126781]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: From 1 August 2003, Entry to Employment (E2E) will be nationally established across all 47 local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) areas. Operational and funding guidance has been produced for E2E and all local LSCs have now contracted with providers to deliver E2E.

Skills Strategy

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the role of the National Employment Panel in implementing the skills strategy. [126794]

Mr. Charles Clarke: *21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential* sets out the National Employment Panel's role in implementing the Skills Strategy. The Panel will work with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Education and Skills to consider how best to strengthen the links between placing people in jobs and supporting claimants in gaining skills for sustainable employment. The Panel will also review how best to help those on inactive benefits (some of whom have been out of the labour market for a long time) to develop their job-related skills and qualifications where this provides a route out of benefit dependency. The Panel will make recommendations by the end of 2003.

The National Employment Panel will also continue to give advice to Ministers for Education and Skills and for Work and Pensions on issues concerning the interface between skills and employment policy. Where relevant, this advice will be considered by the Skills Alliance.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if he will make a statement on the role of the National Skills Strategy in implementing the European Employment Strategy; [126795]

(2) if he will indicate how the proposals in the Skills Strategy (Cm 5810) take forward the European economic reform agenda agreed at Lisbon in 2000 in *(a)* domestic and *(b)* international context. [126800]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In elaborating the Lisbon agenda, the European Council has set targets to raise the overall level of skills across the European Union. Member states contribute to the achievement of these targets through their own national strategies and policies. The Skills Strategy will contribute particularly by raising the skill levels and employability of adults in this country through the new entitlement to free tuition for adults seeking their first level 2 qualification, increased support for higher level skills in areas of sectoral or regional priority and by helping adults gain ICT skills as a third basic skill alongside literacy and numeracy.

Within the overall Lisbon agenda, the European Employment Strategy (EES) provides a framework for reaching key Lisbon employment rate targets. Under the EES, member states develop their national employment strategies and policies in the light of the shared priorities agreed at EU level. For the UK these include providing appropriate guidance in the context of initial training and lifelong learning, modernising the apprenticeship system, tackling poor basic skills and promoting better access to learning for adults, including through the promotion of e-learning. These are all being addressed in the Skills Strategy, which will therefore contribute to the EES by equipping workers in this country with the skills they need for lifetime employability and providing other member states with a model for how to develop the skills base demanded by the modern labour market.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will establish a strategic communications group to develop a plan for skills. [126796]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department will establish the Strategic Communications Group in the near future so that a communication and marketing plan for skills can be agreed by the end of this year, as set out in the Skills White Paper.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how he defines *(a)* low skills equilibrium and *(b)* high skills equilibrium as referred to in the Skills White Paper. [126797]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The low skills equilibrium theory is where, due to adaptation over a number of years to the poor availability of skills in the work force, UK companies often engage in producing more basic, less customised and less skill intensive products than their competitors overseas. This reduces the incentives for individuals and employers to acquire skills, thus becomes self-reinforcing. As we set out in the Underlying Evidence paper for the Skills Strategy that we published in March, it is a vicious circle of low skills, low wages and consumer demand for cheap products and services. The Skills Strategy White Paper makes no reference to a high skills equilibrium.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he expects to publish an Employer Guide to Good Training. [126798]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: We expect the Employer Guide to Good Training will be available in most local Learning and Skills Council areas by September 2004 and in all areas by December 2004.

Entitlement Cards

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions his Department has had with the Home Office about the *(a)* possible introduction of an entitlement card scheme, *(b)* the use

to which such a card would be put on the matters for which he is responsible and *(c)* the costs and funding of the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [126219]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* My Department has been engaged with the Home Office consultation on the possible introduction of an entitlement card scheme. The current proposals for an entitlement card do not include any functions which relate directly to Department for Education and Skills business, so costs and funding have not been discussed in detail.

Environmental Impact

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many of the Department's policies have been screened for their environmental impact since June 2001; how many environmental appraisals have been conducted, and on what policy issues; and what information has been published about these screenings and appraisals. [124720]

Margaret Hodge: The Department for Education and Skills produces a Regulatory Impact Assessment where a proposed policy is likely to have an impact on business, charities and the voluntary sector. The Regulatory Impact Assessment includes an environmental impact appraisal where this is deemed appropriate. Since June 2001, none of the Department's Regulatory Impact Assessments have included an environmental assessment.

The Department also has additional procedures in place to ensure environmental appraisal of policy. Examples of policy issues that have included appraisal of environmental impacts are: guidance to schools in England on energy and water; obtaining accreditation for environmental management of one of our headquarters sites to 'an international standard'; and, in the curriculum, the Growing Schools initiative.

We have not published information on these appraisals.

EU Committees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU Tempus Committee, the number of times and the dates on which it has met since January 2002, the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, the decisions it has made since January 2002 and the means used to communicate these decisions to the House. [110494]

Margaret Hodge: The Tempus Committee membership consists of delegates drawn from the 15 European member states. Usually, two officials from the Department for Education and Skills attend the Committee.

The Tempus Committee has met twice since January 2002, on 21 June 2002 and 21 February 2003.

The role of the Tempus Committee is to oversee powers delegated to the European Commission by the Council of Ministers to implement the Tempus Programme. Such Committees are known as Cosmetology Committees. The Committee's business is largely concerned with the technical details of the programme operation, such as content of the Tempus Guide for Applicants. In common with other Cosmetology Committees, the Tempus Committee's decisions are not routinely deposited for scrutiny under established scrutiny procedures, unless they are politically significant.

Together with member states, the Commission has been conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of Cosmetology Committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

The Working Group on the Friends of Cosmetology is meeting later this month to discuss proposals for interim reform.

As an obligation under this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the Committees. The second report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 10 January 2003 ref 5060/03, COM(03)733.

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every Cosmetology Committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the EU directives implemented by the Department since 8 June 2001. [126590]

Alan Johnson: Since 8 June 2001, the Department for Education and Skills has implemented the Directives listed as follows:

Directive 2001/19/EC of 14 May 2001 amends Council Directives 89/48/EEC and 92/51/EEC on the general system for the recognition of professional qualifications and Council Directives 77/452/EEC, 77/453/EEC, 78/686/EEC, 78/687/EEC, 78/1026/EEC, 78/1027/EEC, 80/154/EEC, 80/155/EEC, 85/384/EEC, 85/432/EEC, 85/433/EEC and 93/16/EEC concerning the professions of nurse responsible for general care, dental practitioner, veterinary surgeon, midwife, architect, pharmacist and doctor.

Council Directive 89/48 EEC, as extended by the Agreement of the EEA signed at Oporto on 2 May 1992 and as adjusted by the protocol signed at Brussels on 17 March 1993, and as amended by the Agreement between the EC and its member states and the Swiss Confederation on the free movement of persons signed at Luxembourg on 21 June 1999, has been implemented in relation to teacher training and induction. Directive 89/48 EEC was inadvertently omitted from the reply of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 112W, about European Union Directives.

European Constitution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions he has had with *(a)* colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and *(b)* counterparts in the European Union about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European constitution. [124776]

Alan Johnson: As part of the normal Whitehall process, I and my officials have had regular correspondence with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss all aspects of the Convention, including legislative competences. We have also had regular contact with member and accession states to discuss issues arising in the Convention. In line with exemptions 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the normal practice of Governments to disclose details about internal discussions, or information whose disclosure would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs.

Fieldwork

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what recent representations he has received from the Field Studies Council about the inclusion of fieldwork in the GCSE and A-level curricula; and what response he has made; [125266]

(2) what provision is made for field work within the curricula for *(a)* science GCSE and *(b)* biology A-level; and whether in each case that provision is optional. [125267]

Margaret Hodge: A number of letters have been received from members of the Field Studies Council in recent months, in particular following the publication of their joint report with the British Ecological Society 'Teaching biology outside the classroom: is it heading for extinction?' last November,.

Correspondents have been reassured that there is no question of fieldwork being dropped from the curriculum and that its use as a method of teaching both GCSE science and A-level biology will continue to be encouraged by the Department. The choice of how best to deliver the curriculum, however, remains with each school.

The Department's "Growing Schools" initiative continues to work with schools to develop and to disseminate best practice in the use of the outdoor classroom in many curriculum subjects, and in science and geography in particular. Tony Thomas, Chief Executive of the FSC, has recently agreed to join the Growing Schools advisory group.

Free Nursery Places

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many free nursery places have been provided in Leicestershire for *(a)* 4-year-olds and *(b)* 3-year-olds in each year since 1999–2000. [125232]

Margaret Hodge: The available information is shown in the table.

Number of free early education places[1] that are fully funded taken up by three and four year olds— Leicestershire local education authority area 2000–02

Position in January each year

	Number of	
	3-year-olds	*4-year-olds*
2000	90	6,900
2001	770	6,600
2002	3,340	6,700

[1] A free early education places is defined as a part-time place at a maintained nursery school or primary school or a part-time equivalent place, i.e. five sessions (half days) a week, at a provider other than a maintained nursery or primary school.

We have made the commitment that by April 2004, six months ahead of our original target, all 3-year-olds whose parents want one, will have access to a free, part-time early education place.

The latest figures on early years provision in England were published by my Department in the Statistical First Release 15/2003 "Provision For Children Under Five Years Of Age In England—January 2003 (Provisional)", copies of which are available from the Library and my Department's website www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics.

Foundation Skills

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in what stages and on what criteria the entitlement to free entry to foundation skills will be introduced in 2004–05. [126785]

Margaret Hodge: We shall be working with the Learning and Skills Council, other partners, and customers, to develop and implement the entitlement to foundation skills for employability in line with the timetable set out in the White Paper "21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential" (Cm 5810).

Further Education

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students failed to complete their courses in further education in England in each of the past five years. [125922]

Alan Johnson: The in year retention/withdrawal status of students enrolled on council funded further education provision in further education sector colleges and external institutions in the five years from 1996/97 to 2000/01 is shown in the following table. The numbers are based on incomplete returns from institutions.

Academic year	*1996/97*	*1997/98*	*1998/99*	*1999/2000*	*2000/01*
Number withdrawn (000)	391.3	386.2	377.2	410.8	327.1
Number continuing/completed (000)	2,144.3	2,205.8	2,037.1	2,153.9	1,864.4
Per cent. withdrawn	15.4	14.9	15.6	16.0	14.9
Per cent. retained	84.6	85.1	84.4	84.0	85.1

Note:
Students on programmes of less than 12 weeks are excluded from this table
2000/01 figures only Include data from 358 colleges and 183 external institutions
1999/2000 figures only include data from 389 colleges and 202 external institutions
1998/99 figures only include data from 402 colleges and 206 external institutions
1997/98 figures only include data from 416 colleges and 229 external institutions
1996/97 figures only include data from 408 colleges and 260 external institutions
Source: Individualised Student Record

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what action he is taking to ensure that engineering equipment available to students at further education colleges matches that used by employers; [126230]

(2) what action he is taking to ensure that capital investment is being used to purchase up to date engineering equipment by further education colleges. [126231]

Alan Johnson: The Government recognised the need for increased levels of capital investment in the further education sector in its 'Success for All' strategy to reform and improve standards in further education. Capital funding will increase by over 60 per cent. in real terms to over £400 million by 2005–06, compared with 2002–03. The Learning and Skills Council administers the capital programme for the post-16 sector. I have asked John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, to write to the hon. Gentleman with the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills over how many financial years he will phase in the new national framework for setting fees in further education. [126792]

Alan Johnson: We intend to phase in the new arrangements for fees in further education from the 2004/05 academic year, with a view to full implementation from the 2005/06 academic year. However, we and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) will consult sector representatives and others on the new arrangements and will take into account views expressed on the timing of implementation before finalising our plans.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which further education colleges will be able to claim compensation for losses due to the withdrawal of individual learning accounts; and if he will make a statement. [125915]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: As a result of a report by the Parliamentary Ombudsman on a complaint from a learning provider, the Department has decided, in line with Government Accounting guidance, to offer reimbursement to registered Individual Learning Account (ILA) learning providers, including further education colleges, in respect of those learners who properly applied to open accounts before 24 October 2001; were committed to purchase ILA eligible learning with a specific learning provider; and who had not been issued with account numbers by the time the system closed down at 6.30 pm on 23 November 2001, subject to the provision of appropriate evidence.

All learning providers who were active in the period leading up to the closure of the programme have been invited to claim against these criteria.

These learning providers have also been invited to make claims for payment in respect of learners, who had received their ILAs and had received learning, but that learning had not been recorded on the ILA Centre system before the scheme was closed.

GCSE Mathematics

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage marks were required to pass GCSE mathematics at each grade from A*- G in each year from 1985 to 2000; and if he will make a statement. [123952]

Mr. Miliband: The GCSE is not a pass/fail examination. The GCSE grading system is criteria-related and grade boundary ranges for each subject are established each year by awarding bodies, making reference to candidates' work from the previous year, grade descriptions, past papers and statistical data. Each boundary is set by individual awarding bodies using both professional judgment and key statistical evidence.

Although QCA has access to detailed information on the grade boundaries set in all subjects at GCSE for each awarding body, further work will be required on these data to present them in the form requested. It will be lodged in the House of Commons Library in due course and will show the grade boundary marks from 1988, as this was the first year in which the GCSE was examined.

Good Practice Frameworks

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on what timescale he will introduce good practice frameworks for teaching and learning providers. [126790]

Alan Johnson: Within our 'Success for All' strategy, we set up the Standards Unit in January 2003 to improve teaching standards in priority curriculum areas by developing good practice frameworks and associated teacher training and support. The Unit has developed innovative materials in four curriculum areas (science, construction, business studies and entry to employment), which are being trialled with 28 providers in June and July 2003 and piloted with over 100 providers from September 2003. We will also start research and development work on four further curriculum areas (health and social care, maths, land-based studies and information and communication technologies) from September 2003. All the frameworks will be disseminated widely once they have been evaluated.

Higher Education

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research he has assessed into the relative likelihood of students from disadvantaged backgrounds prematurely reducing their level of participation within higher education courses by dropping out of courses or by forgoing the opportunity to progress to more advanced courses; and if he will make a statement. [118146]

Alan Johnson: A number of research studies have explored the factors associated with students dropping out of higher education. Although the evidence is mixed, there is some evidence that those from lower social classes are more likely to drop out. The evidence also shows, however, that non-completion is a complex

process that cannot normally be explained by any single factor. Significant factors (many of which are inter-related) include:

incompatibility between the student and their course or institution;

lack of preparation for higher education;

lack of commitment to the course;

level of prior attainment;

financial hardship;

poor academic progress;

health or other personal reasons;

age;

gender; and

whether or not the individual applied through clearing.

Studies in this area include:

(i) "Right Choice? A follow up to 'Making the Right Choice'" by Connor H, Pearson R, Pollard E, Tyers C, Willison R. Universities UK 2001, available from http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/pubs/report.php?id = 1427uuk

(ii) "Effects of in-class variation and student rank on the probability of withdrawal: cross-section and time-series analysis for UK university students", by Arulampalam, W. Naylor, R.A. and Smith, J., presented at the Royal Economic Society Conference at the University of Warwick in March 2002. It can be downloaded from http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/economics/staff/faculty/naylor/publications/

(iii) "Dropping Out: A study of early leavers from Higher Education" by Rhys Davies and Peter Elias, DfES Research Report 386 available from http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/

(iv) "Higher Education: Student Retention" a report made by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to the House of Commons Education and Employment Committee, found at http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200001/cmselect/cmeduemp/124/12402.htm

The Government are committed to raising the participation rates for people from less affluent backgrounds, and have introduced the Excellence Challenge, including the AimHigher campaign, which is targeted at raising attainment and aspirations among young people who traditionally would not consider going to university.

HEFCE has allocated £265 million to higher education institutions in 2003–04 for widening access and improving retention. This figure recognises the additional costs of supporting students from non-traditional backgrounds and thereby increases the likelihood that they will complete their courses successfully.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the percentage change in further education students taking up places in higher education was in each year since 1997 in *(a)* Shrewsbury and Atcham and *(b)* Shropshire; [119387]

(2) how many further education students took up places in higher education in *(a)* Shrewsbury and Atcham and *(b)* Shropshire in each year since 1997. [119388]

Mr. Miliband: The available information shows the previous educational establishments of applicants accepted through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) to full-time first degree and HND courses at UK higher education institutions. The figures for Shropshire are in the table. Corresponding information for Shrewsbury and Atcham constituency is not held centrally.

Applicants accepted through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND study from Shropshire local education authority by previous educational establishment

	Year of entry						Percentage change, 1998 to 2002
Acceptances	*1997*	*[1]1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	
Numbers							
Maintained[2]	440	337	363	332	365	402	19.3
Independent	217	207	208	208	171	197	-4.8
Further education	1,177	746	773	774	841	761	2.0
Other	158	91	92	79	100	70	-23.1
Not known	208	140	183	220	261	260	n/a
Total	2,200	1,521	1,619	1,613	1,738	1,690	11.1
Percentage change each year							
Further education	[3]n/a	[1]n/a	3.6	0.2	8.7	-9.5	n/a
All establishments	[3]n/a	[1]n/a	6.4	-0.4	7.7	-2.8	n/a

[1] In 1998, 'Shropshire' local education authority split into 'Shropshire' and 'The Wrekin'. As a result, there is a drop in numbers as some of the establishments took pupils who were residing in 'The Wrekin'. Hence, figures from 1997 and 1998 are not comparable.
[2] Maintained includes comprehensive, grammar, sixth form centre and other maintained.
[3] The percentage increase from 1996 to 1997 is not available.
Source:
UCAS.

The number of applicants accepted through UCAS from Shropshire, from further education establishments to higher education, rose by 2.0 per cent. between 1998 and 2002. For all accepted applicants from Shropshire the figure was 11.1 per cent.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of students from *(a)* professional, *(b)* manual trades and *(c)* unskilled backgrounds in (i) Shrewsbury and Atcham, (ii) Shropshire and (iii) England took up places at university in 2002. [119389]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department only holds participation rates broken down by social class at national level.

The available information relates to the Age Participation Index (API) by social class. The API calculates the proportion of UK domiciled students who enter full-time HE by the age of 20 and is expressed as a percentage of the averaged 18–19 year old population.

The most recent information, for 2001/02 is in the table.

Age Participation Index (API) by social class, 2001/02

Percentage

Social class	*2001*
I Professional	79
II Intermediate	50
IIIn Skilled non-manual	33
IIIm Skilled manual	21
IV Partly skilled	18
V Unskilled	15
I-IIIn	50
IIIm-V	19
Total	35

The Government are committed to raising the participation rates for people from less affluent backgrounds, and have introduced the AimHigher campaign, which is targeted at raising attainment and aspirations among young people who traditionally would not consider going to university.

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent *(a)* qualitative and *(b)* quantitive analysis has been made of the (i) barriers to entry to higher education and (ii) reasons for withdrawal from higher education before successful completion of a course of study in relation to the different socio-economic background of students. [121755]

Margaret Hodge: The Youth Cohort Study shows that around nine in 10 young people who achieve two or more A-levels by 18 progress to Higher Education by the time they are 21. Differences in participation rates between different social class groups largely reflect differences in prior attainment.

Research published by the Department in 2001 ("Social Class and Higher Education: Issues Affecting Participation by Lower Social Class groups" Connor, H. *et al* DfEE Research Report No. 246) looked at the factors affecting participation in HE by different social class groups. It found that among those who were qualified to enter higher education but had decided against going the main reasons were because they wanted to start work, because they did not need a higher education qualification for their chosen career or because of the expected costs involved. Other research into the factors affecting participation by different social class groups includes:

UCAS (2002) "Paving the Way. Project Report. Informing change in higher education and progression partnerships with the voice of the under-represented"

NAO "Widening participation in higher education in England. Report by the comptroller and auditor general" HC 485 Session 2001–2002 18 January 2002.

Forsyth, A. and Furlong, A. (2000) "Socioeconomic disadvantage and access to higher education" Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Archer, L. (2001) "Social Class and Access to Higher Education. A Report on findings from the Social Class and Widening Participation to HE Project" University of North London. Occasional paper.

A number of research studies have explored the factors associated with students dropping out of higher education. The evidence shows that non-completion is a complex process that cannot normally be explained by any single factor. The evidence is mixed, but there is some evidence that those from lower social classes are more likely to drop out but that this seems to be largely due to other factors linked to non-completion, including:

levels of prior attainment;

incompatibility between the student and their course or institution;

lack of preparation for higher education;

lack of commitment to the course;

financial hardship; and

poor academic progress.

Research which explores the causes of non-completion includes:

'Right Choice?' A follow up to 'Making the Right Choice' by Connor H, Pearson R, Pollard E, Tyers C, Willison R. Universities UK 2001

'Effects of in-class variation and student rank on the probability of withdrawal: cross-section and time-series analysis for UK university students', by Arulampalam, W. Naylor, R.A. and Smith, J., presented at the Royal Economic Society Conference at the University of Warwick in March 2002.

'Dropping Out: A study of early leavers from Higher Education' by Rhys Davies and Peter Elias, DfES Research Report 386

'Higher Education: Student Retention' a report made by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to the House of Commons Education and Employment Committee.

The Government are committed to raising the participation rates for people from less affluent backgrounds. By the end of the decade they want to move towards half of all 18–30 year olds participating in HE, but within that target they are committed to ensuring that all those who can benefit from HE will be willing and able to do so, regardless of their background. 'Aimhigher' is the brand name for a range of initiatives through which Government and their key partners aim to widen participation in HE. HEFCE has allocated £265 million to higher education institutions in 2003–04 for widening access and improving retention. This figure recognises the additional costs of supporting students from non-traditional backgrounds and thereby increases the likelihood that they will complete their courses successfully.

Government have listened to those who say that people from poorer backgrounds need additional incentives and financial help to continue in full-time education. We will continue to provide a tuition fee remission grant and, from autumn 2004, full-time HE students with parents on the lowest incomes will be eligible for a new HE Grant of up to £1,000 a year for living costs. No student or parent will have to pay any up-front tuition fee—they can defer paying these until after they graduate. We are also raising the level of repayment from £10,000 to £15,000 to reduce the levels of repayment for all graduates.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many 18–20 year olds entered higher education in each year since 1990 in *(a)* each local education authority and *(b)* England; [122980]

(2) what proportion of 18–20 year olds entered higher education in each year since 1990 in *(a)* each local education authority and *(b)* England. [122981]

Margaret Hodge: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the higher education participation rate of 18–20 year olds, broken down according to family income quintiles and deciles was in each year since 1990. [122985]

Margaret Hodge: The Department does not hold information broken down by family income. The available information relates to the Age Participation Index (API) by social class. The API calculates the proportion of UK domiciled students who enter full-time HE by the age of 20 and is expressed as a percentage of the averaged 18–19 year old population.

The available information is in the table.

Age Participation Index (API) by social class, 1991–2001

	Year of entry										
	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
I Professional	55	71	73	78	80	82	79	72	73	76	79
II Intermediate	36	39	42	45	46	47	48	45	45	48	50
IIIn Skilled non-manual	22	27	29	31	31	32	31	29	30	33	33
IIIm Skilled manual	11	15	17	18	18	18	19	18	18	19	21
IV Partly skilled	12	14	16	17	17	17	18	17	17	19	18
V Unskilled	6	9	11	11	12	13	14	13	13	14	15
I-IIIn	35	40	43	46	47	48	48	45	45	48	50
IIIm-V	11	14	16	17	17	18	18	17	17	18	19
Total	23	28	30	32	32	33	33	31	32	33	35

The Government are committed to raising the participation rates for people from less affluent backgrounds, and have introduced the AimHigher campaign, which is targeted at raising attainment and aspirations among young people who traditionally would not consider going to university.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what proportion of 18-year-olds applied for entry to higher education in each year since 1996 in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* each English Government office region and *(c)* each education authority in the North East Government office region. [125630]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 14 July 2003]:* The available information is from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and covers those aged 18, applying for full-time first degree and HMD courses at UK Higher Education Institutions. The relevant details are shown in the table.

Autumn 1996 entry

	17-year-old population in 1995	*18-year-old applicants*	*Proportion (percentage)*
UK domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK			
UK	667,593	167,131	25.0
English domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK—by Government office region of domicile			
Government office region			
Eastern	59,576	15,821	26.6
East Midlands	47,141	11,369	24.1
Greater London	72,655	19,188	26.4
Merseyside	16,776	3,857	23.0
North East	30,224	6,610	21.9
North West	63,006	15,628	24.8
South East	90,233	25,811	28.6
South West	53,741	14,222	26.5

Autumn 1996 entry

	17-year-old population in 1995	*18-year-old applicants*	*Proportion (percentage)*
West Midlands	61,470	14,961	24.3
Yorkshire	56,472	12,753	22.6
England	551,294	140,220	25.4
North East domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK—by local education authority of domicile			
Region			
Cleveland[1]	6,994	1,571	22.5
Hartlepool[1]			
Middlesbrough[1]			
Redcar and Cleveland[1]			
Stockton on Tees[1]			
Durham[1]	7,041	1,436	20.4
Darlington[1]			
Northumberland	3,748	998	26.6
Gateshead	2,169	306	14.1
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,869	760	26.5
North Tyneside	2,134	448	21.0
South Tyneside	1,749	320	18.3
Sunderland	3,520	747	21.2
Tyne and Wear unknown		24	
England	30,224	6,610	21.9

Autumn 1997 entry

	17-year-old population in 1996	*18-year-old applicants*	*Proportion (percentage)*
UK domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK			
UK	726,736	182,035	25.0
English domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK—by Government office region of domicile			
Government office region			
Eastern	65,022	17,041	26.2
East Midlands	51,262	12,367	24.1
Greater London	78,622	20,895	26.6
Merseyside	18,367	4,381	23.9

Autumn 1997 entry

	17-year-old population in 1996	18-year-old applicants	Proportion (percentage)
North East	33,837	7,147	21.1
North West	68,617	16,798	24.5
South East	98,011	27,988	28.6
South West	58,368	15,357	26.3
West Midlands	67,230	15,999	23.8
Yorkshire	61,742	14,397	23.3
England	601,078	152,370	25.3
North East domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK—by local education authority of domicile			
Region			
Cleveland[1]	—	—	—
Hartlepool[1]	1,243	213	17.1
Middlesbrough[1]	2,079	335	16.1
Redcar and Cleveland[1]	1,888	420	22.2
Stockton on Tees[1]	2,526	558	22.1
Durham[1]	6,587	1,470	22.3
Darlington[1]	1,264	244	19.3
Northumberland	4,128	1,234	29.9
Gateshead	2,495	278	11.1
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,209	635	19.8
North Tyneside	2,420	607	25.1
South Tyneside	2,026	388	19.1
Sunderland	3,971	706	17.8
Tyne and Wear unknown	—	59	—
England	33,837	7,147	21.1

Autumn 1998 entry

	17-year-old population in 1997	18-year-old applicants	Proportion (percentage)
UK domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK			
UK	747,354	184,870	24.7
English domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK—by Government office region of domicile			
Government office region			
Eastern	66,445	17,381	26.2
East Midlands	53,264	12,755	23.9
Greater London	81,846	21,607	26.4
Merseyside	18,559	4,380	23.6
North East	34,545	7,430	21.5
North West	70,651	17,492	24.8
South East	101,303	27,585	27.2
South West	60,366	15,416	25.5
West Midlands	69,163	16,669	24.1
Yorkshire	63,559	14,149	22.3
England	619,702	154,864	25.0
North East domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK—by local education authority of domicile			
Region			
Cleveland[1]	—	—	—
Hartlepool[1]	1,216	246	20.2
Middlesbrough[1]	2,149	373	17.4
Redcar and Cleveland[1]	2,003	395	19.7
Stockton on Tees[1]	2,540	593	23.3
Durham[1]	6,631	1,341	20.2
Darlington[1]	1,318	286	21.7
Northumberland	4,336	1,248	28.8
Gateshead	2,547	546	21.4
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,292	717	21.8
North Tyneside	2,559	613	24.0
South Tyneside	2,021	371	18.4
Sunderland	3,933	701	17.8
Tyne and Wear unknown	—	—	—
England	34,545	7,430	21.5

Autumn 1999 entry

	17-year-old population in 1998	18-year-old applicants	Proportion (percentage)
UK domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK			
UK	741,836	180,038	24.3
English domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK—by Government office region of domicile			
Government office region			
Eastern	65,851	16,584	25.2
East Midlands	52,215	12,304	23.6
Greater London	82,099	21,869	26.6
Merseyside	18,247	4,276	23.4
North East	33,561	7,230	21.5
North West	69,506	16,960	24.4
South East	100,454	27,423	27.3
South West	59,447	14,722	24.8
West Midlands	67,969	15,897	23.4
Yorkshire	62,794	13,873	22.1
England	612,142	151,138	24.7
North East domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK—by local education authority of domicile			
Region			
Cleveland[1]	—	—	—
Hartlepool[1]	1,194	213	17.8
Middlesbrough[1]	2,083	374	18.0
Redcar and Cleveland[1]	1,919	396	20.6
Stockton on Tees[1]	2,551	611	24.0
Durham[1]	6,433	1,411	21.9
Darlington[1]	1,296	277	21.4
Northumberland	4,217	1,119	26.5
Gateshead	2,343	450	19.2
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,212	687	21.4
North Tyneside	2,447	631	25.8
South Tyneside	2,022	376	18.6
Sunderland	3,844	685	17.8
Tyne and Wear unknown	—	—	—
England	33,561	7,230	21.5

Autumn 2000 entry

	17-year-old population in 1999	18-year-old applicants	Proportion (percentage)
UK domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK			
UK	727,022	179,584	24.7
English domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK—by Government office region of domicile			
Government office region			
Eastern	64,185	16,518	25.7
East Midlands	50,605	12,140	24.0
Greater London	81,601	22,222	27.2
Merseyside	18,223	4,329	23.8
North East	33,143	7,128	21.5
North West	68,688	16,990	24.7
South East	97,596	26,332	27.0
South West	58,598	14,953	25.5
West Midlands	66,601	16,079	24.1
Yorkshire	61,719	13,569	22.0
England	600,957	150,260	25.0
North East domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK—by local education authority of domicile			
Region			
Cleveland[1]	—	—	—
Hartlepool[1]	1,201	232	19.3
Middlesbrough[1]	2,012	392	19.5
Redcar and Cleveland[1]	1,885	362	19.2
Stockton on Tees[1]	2,486	616	24.8
Durham[1]	6,345	1,309	20.6
Darlington[1]	1,267	283	22.3
Northumberland	4,134	1,101	26.6

Autumn 2000 entry

	17-year-old population in 1999	18-year-old applicants	Proportion (percentage)
Gateshead	2,456	484	19.7
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,226	717	22.2
North Tyneside	2,371	568	24.0
South Tyneside	1,973	396	20.1
Sunderland	3,786	668	17.6
Tyne and Wear unknown	..	..	..
England	33,143	7,128	21.5

Autumn 2001 entry

	17-year-old population in 2000	18-year-old applicants	Proportion (percentage)
UK domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK			
UK	735,605	185,553	25.2
English domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK—by Government office region of domicile			
Government office region			
Eastern	64,408	16,655	25.9
East Midlands	51,619	12,842	24.9
Greater London	82,236	23,059	28.0
Merseyside	18,560	4,641	25.0
North East	33,550	7,366	22.0
North West	70,541	17,524	24.8
South East	98,611	26,861	27.2
South West	59,589	15,053	25.3
West Midlands	68,725	16,953	24.7
Yorkshire	63,098	14,476	22.9
England	610,937	155,430	25.4
North East domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK—by local education authority of domicile			
Region			
Cleveland[1]	..	..	..
Hartlepool[1]	1,226	263	21.5
Middlesbrough[1]	2,098	456	21.7
Redcar and Cleveland[1]	1,824	411	22.5
Stockton on Tees[1]	2,495	604	24.2
Durham[1]	6,540	1,363	20.8
Darlington[1]	1,255	291	23.2
Northumberland	4,094	1,035	25.3
Gateshead	2,541	489	19.2
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,239	888	27.4
North Tyneside	2,374	478	20.1
South Tyneside	1,959	383	19.6
Sunderland	3,905	705	18.1
Tyne and Wear unknown	..	..	..
England	33,550	7,366	22.0

Autumn 2002 entry

	17-year-old population in 2001	18-year-old applicants	Proportion (percentage)
UK domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK			
UK	737,343	187,539	25.4
English domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK—by Government office region of domicile			
Government office region			
Eastern	64,847	17,099	26.4
East Midlands	51,988	12,873	24.8
Greater London	83,668	23,436	28.0
Merseyside	18,350	4,465	24.3
North East	33,600	7,611	22.7
North West	70,695	17,653	25.0
South East	99,511	27,239	27.4
South West	60,035	15,138	25.2
West Midlands	67,817	16,967	25.0
Yorkshire	63,062	14,316	22.7
England	613,573	156,797	25.6
North East domiciled applicants, aged 18, applying through UCAS to full-time first degree and HND courses in the UK—by local education authority of domicile			
Region			
Cleveland[1]	..	..	..
Hartlepool[1]	1,268	261	20.6
Middlesbrough[1]	2,055	450	21.9
Redcar and Cleveland[1]	1,949	370	19.0
Stockton on Tees[1]	2,552	660	25.9
Durham[1]	6,382	1,388	21.7
Darlington[1]	1,260	319	25.3
Northumberland	4,054	1,102	27.2
Gateshead	2,542	504	19.8
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,383	950	28.1
North Tyneside	2,334	467	20.0
South Tyneside	2,034	408	20.1
Sunderland	3,787	732	19.3
Tyne and Wear unknown	..	..	..
England	33,600	7,611	22.7

[1] There are discontinuities in the time series caused by Local Government Reorganisations. Also, UCAS do not hold domicile breakdowns for all new authorities in the year that reorganisation took place and so some participation rates for new authorities are not shown until the following year.

Notes:

1. Participation rates have been calculated using the 17-year-old population from the previous year to reduce the distortion caused to LEA populations by the migration of students to their place of study. However, any migration, for whatever reason, at age 17 will affect the rates shown here, particularly between authorities that are geographically close, for example in the London area.
2. Accepted applicants with unknown English domiciles are excluded from the figures.
3. Population figures relate to persons aged 17 as at 31 August in the year prior to entry, counts taken at the following 1 January; accepted applicants are aged 18 at 30 September in the year of entry.

Source:
UCAS

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the progress that has been made towards achieving a 50 per cent. participation rate in higher education by 2010. [126814]

Alan Johnson: The Initial Entry Rate is the measure which we use to assess progress towards achieving the 50 per cent. participation rate in higher education.

The outturn Initial Entry Rate figure for 2001–02 is 43.5per cent.. This updates our previous best estimate of around 43 per cent..

A National Statistics Quality Review of the Initial Entry Rate, intended to improve the transparency and robustness of the measure, will be published shortly.

Independent Schools

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils in receipt of assisted places to independent schools have been admitted to Russell Group Universities in each year since 1997. [118039]

Alan Johnson: The information is not held centrally. Figures published by the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) show the number of

students accepted for entry to HE who came from independent schools, but do not indicate whether or not they had received an assisted place.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Mahmood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether further education colleges will be able to claim compensation for losses due to the withdrawal of individual learning accounts. [125786]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: As a result of a report by the Parliamentary Ombudsman on a complaint from a learning provider, the Department has decided, in line with Government Accounting guidance, to offer reimbursement to registered Individual Learning Account (ILA) learning providers, including further education colleges, in respect of those learners who properly applied to open accounts before 24 October 2001; were committed to purchase ILA eligible learning with a specific learning provider; and who had not been issued with account numbers by the time the system closed down at 6.30 pm on 23 November 2001, subject to the provision of appropriate evidence.

All learning providers who were active in the period leading up to the closure of the programme have been invited to claim against these criteria.

These learning providers have also been invited to make claims for payment in respect of learners who had received their ILAs and had received learning, but that learning had not been recorded ILA Centre system before the scheme was closed.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations he has received since November 2002 in connection with the reintroduction of a scheme for individual learning accounts *(a)* in favour and *(b)* opposed to its revival; what safeguards were suggested to prevent fraud and waste; what responses he has sent to those making representations; and if he will make a statement on reasons for not proceeding with a successor scheme. [126799]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Since November 2002 I have received 10 letters on the future of Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs), and replied to 6 Parliamentary Questions about ILAs. In addition, some of the 83 responses to our "Developing a National Skills Strategy and Delivery Plan: Progress Report" published on 26 March, including the responses from the CBI and TUC, covered ILA. Correspondents often supported some, but not all, characteristics of ILA, and a number of comments have been mutually contradictory. For example some wished to keep the wide range of providers in the original ILA scheme because they believed that that increased learner choice; others wished to restrict the range of providers to minimise wasteful competition between them and to protect quality. It is, therefore, not possible to categorise representations as simply in favour of, or opposed to, ILA; opinions are usually qualified. What is clear is that the principles of the ILA scheme are still widely supported.

As to safeguards, many correspondents suggested that fraud and waste in ILA would be minimised if the assessment process for learning providers was more rigorous. I agree with this view.

Those who have written to me specifically about the future of ILA have had full replies dealing with the points they raise. Their comments, those of hon. Members, and those of the respondents to the Progress Report, have been carefully considered in making our decision on the future of ILA.

The reasons for not proceeding with a stand alone successor scheme are set out in paragraphs 4.31 and 4.32 of the White Paper "21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential" (Cm5810) published on 9 July.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on recent developments in the winding-up of the scheme for individual learning accounts, with particular reference to *(a)* the number of learning providers whose account has not been cleared, *(b)* the number of fraud investigations (i) concluded, (ii) in process and (iii) still under consideration, *(c)* the overall losses in fraud and waste and *(d)* compensation payable to learning providers and students after closure of the scheme. [126805]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Since the closure of the Individual Learning Account programme on 23 November 2001, there remain 558 registered learning providers whose accounts have not been cleared as at 9 July 2003.

The Department's Special Investigations Unit has investigated 159 learning provider organisations. 100 of these cases were passed to the police. Police have made 78 arrests, which have to date resulted in charges being brought against 31 individuals, 18 of whom are awaiting court appearances. To date, five learning provider cases are concluded, resulting in either successful prosecutions or recovery of funds. The precise extent of fraudulent activity will not be known until all investigations are complete.

As a result of a report by the Parliamentary Ombudsman on a complaint from a learning provider, the Department has decided, in line with Government Accounting guidance, to offer reimbursement to registered learning providers in respect of those learners who properly applied to open accounts before 24 October 2001; were committed to purchase ILA eligible learning with a specific learning provider; and who had not been issued with account numbers by the time the system closed down at 6.30pm on 23 November 2001, subject to the provision of appropriate evidence. All learning providers who were active in the period leading up to the closure of the programme have been invited to claim against these criteria. Evidence received as a result is still in the early stages of assessment.

The Department has additionally previously reimbursed £51,843 to a total of 498 learners whose accounts were used without their consent, and who subsequently incurred additional expenses in order to pursue their chosen course of learning.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by his Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if he will make a statement. [126204]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Department for Education and Skills has entered into two outsourced IT contracts since 1997.

The first was with Xansa UK Plc (formerly FI Group) for the delivery of the applications development and support services to the Department and ran for a period of 5 years from 1 April 1997. Spend over the period of the contract was £41.5 million.

The contract to deliver these services for a period of 5 years from 1 April 2002 was awarded to Cap Gemini Ernst & Young UK Plc following a re-competition. The level of spend over the period of this contract will largely be determined by demand. Spend in the first 12 months was £16 million.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he takes to ensure that learning materials imported or downloaded from abroad for dissemination to persons with learning difficulties are compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [125004]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Local education authorities and schools are required under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to plan strategically to increase the accessibility of schools to disabled pupils and to produce accessibility strategies and plans. The planning duty includes access to the physical environment, to the curriculum and to written information in alternative formats. It is up to local education authorities and schools to decide how they fulfil those duties and which resources to use with pupils, including disabled pupils, whether or not those resources come from abroad. In June 2002 guidance entitled "Accessible Schools: Planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils" was made available to local education authorities and schools on carrying out these duties.

Leeds Study Support Centres

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total grant received by the Leeds Study Support Centres from his Department will be in the current financial year; and what the figure was in financial year *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2001–02. [123409]

Margaret Hodge: The Department currently funds study support in all local education authorities and schools through the Standards Fund. From this source, Education Leeds received £838,127 in 2001–02; £814,636 in 2002–03; and £795,951 in 2003–04. In addition, through the Excellence in Cities strand of the Standards Fund programme, Leeds received extra funding for study support amounting to £1,207,439 in 2001–02; £1,215,141 in 2002–03; and £1,080,854 in 2003–04.

There are also two Playing for Success study support centres in Leeds: at Leeds United Football Club, and at Leeds Rhinos Rugby League Football Club. Leeds United Football club received £100,000 grant prior to 2001/02. The Leeds United centre received recurrent grants from the Department of £100,000 in 2001–02; £90,000 in 2002–03; and has been allocated £80,000 in 2003–04. Leeds Rhinos received £100,000 in 2001–02, £100,000 in 2002–03; and has been allocated £200,000 in 2003–04 which includes a 100,000 capital grant. The Department also awarded grants of £9,400 and £10,000 to the Leeds United and Leeds Rhinos centres respectively, as part of a national quality development project in 2002–03.

Leicestershire Schools

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what proportion of Leicestershire schools were in each of the bandings for socio-economic circumstances in 2002–03; [125222]

(2) which schools in the Loughborough constituency were in each of the bandings for socio-economic circumstances in 2002–03. [125223]

Margaret Hodge: The percentages of maintained, mainstream schools in Leicestershire with KS1 and/or KS2 test results grouped according to the percentage of pupils "known to be eligible for free school meals (FSM)" as included within the national benchmarks information of the Department's 2002 Autumn Package of Pupil Performance Information are shown as follows:

Percentages

Band 1 (Up to and including 8% FSM)	*Band 2 (More than 8% and up to 20% FSM)*	*Band 3 (More than 20% and up to 35% FSM)*	*Band 4 (More than 35% and up to 50% FSM)*	*Band 5 (More than 50% FSM)*
71	24	5	1	0

[1] Figures do not add to 100 because of rounding.

On the above definitional basis, schools in the Loughborough constituency within each of the FSM bands were:

FSM band	*School name*
3	Booth Wood Primary School
1	Burton-on-the Wolds Primary School
4	Cobden Primary School and Community Centre
1	Hall Orchard Church of England Primary School
1	Hathern Church of England Primary School
1	Highgate Community Primary School
1	Holywell Primary School
1	Loughborough Church of England Primary School
1	Mountfields Lodge School
2	Outwoods Edge Primary School
3	Redlands Community Primary School
3	Rendell Primary School
2	Robert Bakewell Primary School and Community Centre
2	Rosebery Primary School
1	Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Loughborough
1	Sant Winefride's Catholic Primary School, Shepshed
3	Shelthorpe Primary School Special Unit and Community Centre
1	Shepshed High School
1	St. Bartholomew CofE Primary School
2	St. Mary's Catholic Primary School
2	Stonebow Primary School
2	Thorpe Acre Junior School
1	Wymeswold Church of England Primary School

Level 2/3 Qualifications

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria will be applied for targeting support for level 3 qualifications *(a)* by sector and *(b)* by region. [126803]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Support for intermediate skills at level 3 will be focussed on those in priority sectors and to meet specific regional skills needs. Criteria for targeting the level 3 support will be determined in consultation with the Sector Skills Development Agency, the Learning and Skills Council and the Regional Development Agencies.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether it is his policy to offer a renewed entitlement to free learning at level 2 to people whose previous skills have become obsolete. [126804]

Mr. Miliband: The entitlement to free provision for level 2 learning announced in the White Paper "21st Century Skills: Releasing Our Potential" is for those without a qualification at that level. Decisions about the use of public funds for learning in addition to the level 2 entitlement will take account of the needs of those without higher level technical and craft skills and people who are re-skilling for new careers or returning to the labour market. We will consider the question of issue of old or obsolete qualifications which will be examined as we implement the overall Skills Strategy.

Media Training

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost was to his Department of media and voice training for ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123121]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: We have no record of any Minister in this Department receiving media or voice training since 1997.

We do not hold information centrally on any such training undertaken by officials and would only be able to collect it at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his Answer of 8 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 677–68W, on medical schools, what additional funding is attracted by applicants for medical schools with the equivalent of *(a)* more and *(b)* less than 3 Cs at A level who attend the same medical schools. [125672]

Alan Johnson: The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) allocate funding for widening participation and improving retention by assigning students to one of six categories. There are two age categories (which relate to whether the student is under or over the age of 21), each of which is divided into three risk categories as follows:

	Young (under 21)	*Mature (over 21)*
Low risk	A-levels or Highers with at least 17 points: degree or higher	A-levels or Highers with at least 27 points: degree or higher
Medium risk	A-levels or Highers of 9 to 16 points; foundation courses; Baccalaureate	A-levels or Highers with less than 27 points; HE below degree level; foundation courses; access courses
High risk	Less than 9 A-level points; access course; BTEC; GNVQ level 3; HE below degree level; none; others; unknown.	BTEC; GNVQ level 3; Baccalaureate; none; others; unknown.

Students who are categorised as low risk do not attract additional widening participation and improving retention funding. The approximate additional funding attracted by the other categories is as follows:

	Young (under 21)	*Mature (over 21)*
Medium risk	250	370
High risk	370	620

Medical Schools

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to the answer of 8 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 677–78W, on medical schools, how many of the medical students referred to attracted additional funding because their pre-entry qualifications are lower than the equivalent of three Cs at A level in each year since 1997; and how many mature entrants there were in each year since 1997. [125673]

Alan Johnson: Details of the number of entrants to higher education, broken down by subject of study, entry qualification and age are available in annexes to the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) publication "Performance Indicators in Higher Education".

Of the 2,900 medical students who attract additional funding from the improving retention pot for full-time students, some 480 do so because they are under 21 years of age and their points score is less than the equivalent of 3 Cs at A level.

The number of entrants to medicine, dentistry or veterinary science are shown in the table:

	Young entrants (under 21)	*Mature entrants (over 21)*
1997/98	5,540	1,250
1998/99	5,400	920
1999/2000	5,720	950
2000/01	5,900	1,210

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his Answer of 8 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 677–78W, on medical schools, what the *(a)* drop-out rate from medical schools and *(b)* drop-out rate from medical schools for students who attract additional funding because they have pre-entry qualifications lower than the equivalent of 3 Cs at A level were in each of the last five years. [125674]

Alan Johnson: In 1999/2000, the non-completion rate following year of entry for young students on medicine, dentistry or veterinary science courses was 2 per cent. This figure has remained broadly static since 1997/98. For students with the equivalent of less than 17 points at A level, the non-completion rate was 5 per cent. in 1999/2000.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many applications there were for each place at medical schools in the last year for which statistics are available; and what the average A level points score was of the successful candidates. [124170]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Figures available are from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and cover applications and acceptances for full-time entrants to first degree courses at UK institutions. Information covering entry in autumn 2002 is in the table.

Applicants[1] and acceptances to medical schools through UCAS by domicile, 2002 entry

	Applicants	*Acceptances*
Home	9,498	6,287
EU	666	142
Other overseas	1,771	530
All domiciles	11,935	6,959

[1] In 2002, each applicant could make up to 6 applications of which up to four could be to medical schools.

The figures show that there were 1.7 applicants for each medical school place.

The UCAS tariff was introduced for 2002 entry and replaced the 'A' level points score. The tariff establishes agreed equivalences between different types of qualifications and reports achievement for entry to Higher Education in a numerical format. This allows comparisons between applicants with different types and volumes of achievement. In 2002 the average tariff score relating to solely A level qualifications, for UK domiciled accepted applicants with 2 or more A levels was 405.6 (where an A grade at 'A' level is equivalent to 120 points and lower points scores relate to other grades).

Mental Health

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the impact of the draft Mental Health Bill on the services his Department provides for people with mental health needs. [126003]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We work closely with the Department of Health on the development and implementation of policy on child and adolescent mental health services, in particular through the Children's National Service Framework. No formal assessment has been made of the impact of the draft Mental Health Bill on education services.

Middle Schools

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many middle school children there are in England and Wales; and what the basis is for his policy that middle schools cannot apply for specialist school status. [126750]

Mr. Miliband: The Department's figures show that there are 129,348 pupils in middle deemed secondary schools in England. There are no middle schools or specialist schools in Wales. Responsibility for schools in Wales has been devolved to the National Assembly for Wales.

Middle deemed secondary schools are eligible to apply for specialist school status as part of a joint application. One or more middle deemed secondary schools can apply jointly to the programme with upper schools. From September 2003, three middle schools will be part of the programme.

We are currently reviewing the position of middle schools in relation to making solo applications to the programme.

Modern Apprenticeships

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when a dedicated website for vacancies for qualified modern apprentices will be introduced. [126788]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills over what time the age cap of 25 for entry to modern apprenticeships will be removed. [126789]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: From 1 August 2003, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) will fund those learners who start their Modern Apprenticeship before their 25th birthday for the full length of the entitlement regardless of their age at the finish. I have asked the LSC to consider how they will respond to those who will reach their 25th birthday between the Government's Skills Strategy announcement and the end of July 2003.

As we said in our Skills Strategy, "21st Century Skills—Realising Our Potential", we are committed to ensuring that Modern Apprenticeships are available to those who wish to start over the age of 25. We are working with the LSC and key partners including the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) to develop a more flexible approach to Modern Apprenticeship design and funding, reflecting the different needs of adults.

Modern Languages

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 2 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 730W, what estimate he has made of the number of pupils in maintained schools who will take GCSE *(a)* French, *(b)* Spanish and *(c)* German in each year between 2003 to 2010. [125326]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: We have made no estimate of the number of pupils who will take GCSE French, Spanish and German in future years. The number of pupils who have taken GCSEs in specific modern foreign languages this year will be available in the autumn.

National Professional Qualification for Headship

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make it his policy that teachers enrolling in the National Professional Qualification for Headship in September 2003 will have their costs of supply cover and subsistence met in full regardless of the number of pupils at their school. [126967]

Margaret Hodge: Responsibility for the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) was passed to the National College for School Leadership

(NCSL) in 2001, including responsibility for setting the level of financial support for candidates on the programme.

Having consulted widely, the college has revised its charging policy for a range of its programmes, including NPQH, and has concluded that financial support for supply cover and travel and subsistence should be withdrawn from NPQH candidates from schools with 150 pupils or more from 1 September 2003. The college will continue to cover the cost of the course fees for all applicants on the NPQH programme.

National Skills Strategy

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on his plans for taking forward the National Skills Strategy. [126487]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: At national level, we will build a new Skills Alliance to bring together key economic and delivery partners who will work with the Government to drive forward the Skills Strategy. The Alliance will comprise the key departments (Department for Education and Skills, Department of Trade and Industry, Department for Work and Pensions and the Treasury), the economic partners (the CBI, the TUC and Small Business Council) and the key delivery agencies. We will also invite the Regional Development Agency in each region, working with its partners, to put forward proposals for joint working at regional and local level. The Sector Skills Councils will be major contributors to the process.

The Skills Alliance will ensure collaboration between key partners through the new regional structures, engage employers, trade unions and their representative organisations, advise the Government on the effectiveness of the Skills Strategy and report annually on progress.

Positive Activities for Young People Scheme

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many participants there have been in the Positive Activities for Young People scheme since it was established; how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* temporary staff are employed in the scheme; and what assessment he has made of the scheme's impact on street crime. [126768]

Margaret Hodge: The new Positive Activities programme commenced on 1 May 2003. Information is currently being collected from each lead delivery agency to assess what provision there was over the Whitsun half term. Information for all areas is expected to be available by early August. The first quarterly report, reflecting the provision under PAYP so far, will be published in the autumn.

The employment of staff to deliver PAYP is an issue for Lead Delivery Agents and local delivery partners. It is for them to decide how best to utilise the funding that is provided to them. In addition, £13.75 million has been allocated to Connexions Partnerships for key workers which will provide 435 full-time equivalent posts. These workers will provide targeted support to those young people on the scheme who are most at risk.

Prison Education

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many education hours were cancelled in prisons in England and Wales in each of the last 12 months. [124920]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The following table shows on a month-by-month basis the reported number of hours not delivered against the total number of hours ordered between June 2002 and May 2003.

Month	*Sum of ordered*	*Sum of total not run*
June 2002	95,576	8,083
July 2002	131,691	11,057
August 2002	104,636	8,199
September 2002	116,052	7,136
October 2002	131,860	13,248
November 2002	119,880	8,470
December 2002	94,517	7,317
January 2003	131,213	8,156
February 2003	115,905	8,082
March 2003	134,156	9,974
April 2003	115,217	6,981
May 2003	112,797	7,464
Total	1,403,500	104,167

Education hours may be lost for a range of reasons including operational difficulties in prisons, staff sickness and problems with recruiting teachers.

Public Sector Apprentices

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when recruitment targets for public sector apprentices in Government Departments will be introduced. [126787]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The target, recently agreed by Cabinet Office and Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Ministers, is that by the end of September 2004, the number of civil servants undertaking modern apprenticeships will be 28 per cent. of all staff aged under 25 not qualified to Level 2.

Each Department is establishing its own arrangements for contributing towards the aggregated target.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the Minister for Children will change existing Department for Education and Skills Public Service Agreements. [121003]

Margaret Hodge: There are no plans to change any of the existing DfES Public Service Agreement targets following the changes announced on 13 June, which bring together in this department lead responsibility in Whitehall for policy on children and the family. Work is ongoing to map the various targets which the DfES will inherit from other Departments as a result of its new responsibilities. A full revised list of targets will be laid in the Library of the HOC in due course.

Regional Employment and Skills Action

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on *(a)* the introduction and *(b)* the updating of Frameworks for Regional Employment and Skills Action. [126793]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Regional Development Agencies were asked to lead on creating Frameworks for Regional Employment and Skills Action in each region and to have them in place by October 2002. The Frameworks were initiated by this Department, the DTI and the Department of Work and Pensions and enable key partners and agencies to agree shared priorities and actions to address skills and employment issues at regional level. A Regional Employment and Skills Forum made up of all the key partners and agencies has been established in each region and is responsible for overseeing the production, implementation, monitoring and updating of each Framework.

Research Funding

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how much money the Higher Education Funding Council for England will be allocating to recurrent funding for research in England; [125487]

(2) what percentage of departments in England with 8,500 research active staff received a rating of 4 in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise; and how their funding will change from 2002–03 to 2003–04; [125483]

(3) what funding was available for departments with a 4 rating in 2002–03; and what is available in 2003–04; [125489]

(4) how many and what percentage of academics are working in 4-star rated research departments; and how many 4-star rated research departments there are in England; [125490]

(5) what percentage of research active staff in England are in departments rated 1 to 4, excluding those due to receive capability funding; [125485]

(6) what percentage of departments assessed in England in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise with 6,500 research active academic staff are at a level that will not receive recurrent funding in 2003–04; [125482]

(7) which subjects had fewer than 20 per cent. of departments in England receive a 5 to 5* rating in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise; [125486]

(8) what percentage of departments in research intensive Russell Group institutions in England had research rated 1 to 3a in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise. [125484]

Alan Johnson: In 2003/04, HEFCE is allocating a total of £1,042 million in recurrent research funding to English higher education institutions—an increase of 10.9 per cent. compared with 2002/03. The funding further increases in 2004/05 and 2005/06 by £107 million and £246 million respectively. In addition, HEFCE provided over £26 million through the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) this year to support universities in commercially exploiting their research. HEIF resources will be consolidated into a permanent stream of funding and increase by £80 million and £90 million in 2004/05 and 2005/06 respectively. HEFCE is also allocating £16 million in the next two years to establish 20 Knowledge Exchanges to help direct this activity within regional networks.

HEFCE allocated research funding according to the quality and volume of research departments that were rated 4 and above in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and an additional £20 million to departments that were rated 5* in both the last two RAE's. A further £20 million is also available as capability funding to departments that were rated 3a or 3b in seven specific subject areas, to provide extra support so the research base can improve to match that in the more established fields.

In the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise, 23 per cent. of departments in England received a 4 rating. In line with our policy set out in the Higher Education White Paper, HEFCE has re-balanced the funding levels between ratings for 2003–04 to ensure better resourcing for, and improved quality of, the best research. This has meant a reduction in funding for 4 rated departments from £139 million in 2002–03 to £118 million in 2003–04.

School Budgets

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the impact of *(a)* the increase in National Insurance contributions and *(b)* the new formula spending share, on school budgets in (i) Portsmouth and (ii) the rest of Hampshire; and if he will make a statement. [126182]

Mr. Miliband: The Department does not collect information on the distribution of teaching salaries by school or by local education authority. It is therefore not possible for us to calculate the additional cost of the increase in National Insurance contributions for each local education authority. However, nationally, the increase in additional resources provided for education of £2.7 billion more than match the pressures faced by schools and local education authorities.

In introducing the new funding system in 2003–04, our aim has been to produce the best possible match between the distribution of funds and the differing circumstances and needs of local education authorities. The formula provides the same funding for all comparable pupils right across the country. So the new system consists of a basic amount per pupil—which is the same everywhere—with top-ups for pupils with additional educational needs (again the same per pupil everywhere), and for area costs for salaries, recruitment and retention. Authorities which have more deprived pupils and/or receive extra funding to take account of the high costs of recruiting and retaining staff in their area, receive a higher level of funding overall than those which have comparatively low levels of deprivation and/or do not receive additional funding for area costs. But all authorities received an increase of at least 3.2 per cent. per pupil after taking account of the changes to teachers' pension contributions and the additional £28 million grant provided to authorities ensured a minimum effective increase per pupil of 3.2 per cent. per pupil taking account of changes to the Standards Fund. Local education authorities are responsible for deciding the amount of funding available for the Schools Budget.

School Fires

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many fires in school buildings in each of the last three years have been attributed to *(a)* accidents and *(b)* arson. [123314]

Margaret Hodge: The Department does not collect these figures.

School Meals

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what plans he has to change the criteria for measuring school socio-economic position from the percentage of children receiving school meals; and if he will make a statement; [125225]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect on comparisons for schools socio-economic position of a drop in the number of children receiving free school meals; and if he will make a statement. [125226]

Margaret Hodge: The Department's Annual Schools' Census (ASC) collects information on the numbers of pupils 'known to be eligible for free school meals (FSM)' as a consequence of local authorities (and schools) legal duty to provide them. The ASC does not collect any other information on the socio-economic circumstances of individual pupils or, in aggregate, of schools.

The Department is investigating whether information from other departments' datasets can be linked in ways which preserve necessary data confidentialities but provide measures additional to FSM that improve the appropriateness and robustness of socio-economic comparisons of schools.

There has been a trend downward over the last few years in the numbers of children 'known to be eligible for FSM', due in part to increased employment. About 80 per cent. of children who are entitled to make a claim for a free meal do so, but the rate varies from school to school over time depending on pupil and parental preferences and economic circumstances. Direct, and fair, interpretations of FSM comparisons within and between schools are therefore complicated and complex.

The Department's "Autumn Package of Pupil Performance Information" has shown since 1996 national attainment benchmarks for groups of schools with broadly similar levels of FSM. These are used by schools to gauge their recent relative performances and by OFSTED in discussions with schools during inspection. Schools compare their performances with those of schools in adjacent benchmark groups and bring to bear their detailed knowledge of pupils and their schools in those discussions.

Schools (Funding)

Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he expects to announce plans for future funding of schools education. [125110]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 14 July]:* My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, made a statement in the House on Thursday, 17 July, about the changes that will be made to the school funding system in 2004–05 and 2005–06.

Special Measures

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools were placed into special measures between 1996–97 and 2002–03 in each banding for socio-economic circumstances in the National Benchmark Tables. [125221]

Margaret Hodge: Information is shown in the following table:

FSM Band[1]	*Number*
Primary schools[2]	
Up to and including 8%	113
More than 8% up to 20%	238
More than 20% up to 35%	233
More than 35% up to 50%	223
more than 50%	170
Total	978
Secondary schools[3]	
Up to and including 5%	2
more than 5% up to 9%	9
More than 9% up to 13%	5
more than 13% up to 21 %	27
More than 21 % up to 35%	68
More than 35% up to 50%	51
more than 50%	39
Total	201

Notes:

1. Schools are shown in the Free School Meal (FSM) band within the Autumn Package of Pupil Performance Information of the academic year in which they were placed in special measures, except for schools entering special measures in 2002–03 which have been placed in the band in which they were reported in the 2002 benchmark tables.

2. Maintained, mainstream schools included in the KS1 and/or KS2 benchmark tables. One school—The Five Islands' CE Primary School, Isles of Scilly—was placed in special measures on 3 July 2003 and is an amalgamation of 4 previous schools, and has been excluded from the above table.

3. Maintained, mainstream schools included in the KS3 and/or GCSE/GNVQ benchmark tables.

Secondary and Post-secondary Education

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what targets the Government has set *(a)* institutions and *(b)* students regarding state secondary schools and post-secondary education; and what representations his office has received regarding compliance with and attainment of those targets. [126889]

Margaret Hodge: We set high level national targets which reflect our overall aim for both secondary and post-secondary education achievement. These provide a framework for targets to be determined for institutions and students by those working at the local level. All our national targets and progress against them can be found

in the Departmental Annual Report, copies of which can be found in the House of Commons Library. The Department receives representations covering a wide range of different views on the purpose, importance, choice and definition of targets.

Sex Education

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* schools where allegations of inappropriate sex education have been reported in each of the past two years. [124357]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 9 July 2003]:* In the past two years, the Department has received letters expressing concerns over sex education in Leeds and Barking and Dagenham. In each case the correspondents were advised that headteachers and governors are responsible for making decisions about sex education in schools, in consultation with parents. In the first instance concerns should be raised with the schools. Governing bodies must ensure that teaching materials and programmes used for sex education are in accordance with the framework for Personal, Social and Health Education; and that inappropriate materials are kept out of the classroom. Consulting pupils and their families will help establish what is appropriate and acceptable to them. Where schools work within the SRE guidelines and consult effectively, parents should be reassured about the content of lessons.

SMEs

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when tailored support for leadership and management development in small and medium enterprises will be available. [126784]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The success of small and medium enterprises depends on excellent leadership and management. The Business Improvement Tool for Entrepreneurs and Investors in People management and leadership model help these businesses identify development goals. Our pilot Small Firms Development Account will provide specific funding support up to £1,000 for owner-managers of enterprises employing five to 49 people to develop leadership and management skills within their company. We are also developing a new offer to Managing Directors of firms employing 50 to 200 people to provide them with tailored support. A range of support will be available including mentors and coaches. We will announce further details of this offer in the autumn.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on how many occasions between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisors have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [126674]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003, Special Advisers in my Department travelled abroad on three occasions to Italy, Germany and France, at an average cost of £522.66 per trip. All travel by Special Advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what resources will be available for the proposed expansion of the specialist schools programme; and what projects he has planned for schools in Hampshire. [126183]

Mr. Charles Clarke: In November 2002 the Government lifted the cap on national funding for the specialist schools programme so that any school which meets the required standard can now be a specialist school. We are keen that all secondary schools that want to apply and meet the criteria will become specialist schools.

Also in November, the Government announced the creation of the partnership fund, containing £2 million from the Government and £1 million from the private sector to be administered by the Specialist Schools Trust. The fund is designed specifically to help schools which have been unable to raise all of the required £50,000 sponsorship money, despite having made sustained efforts to do so.

We would encourage Hampshire schools, as indeed we would all schools, to take advantage of these developments.

Staff Costs

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 295–96W, on staff costs, what the average A/AS level score for pupils attending *(a)* sixth form colleges and *(b)* secondary school sixth forms in England in each year since 1995 was; and if he will make a statement on the statistical significance of divergences between the averages. [124220]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is shown in the tables.

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Maintained schools	15.4*	16.1*	16.4*	16.7*	16.9	17.1	17.4*	—
6th Form colleges	14.8*	15.3*	16.0*	16.4*	16.9	17.0	17.9*	—
All schools	16.9	17.6	17.9	18.1	18.2	18.4	18.9	—
All FE sector	12.2	12.5	13.1	10.4	13.4	13.8	14.8	—
Total	15.1	15.7	16.1	16.0	16.3	16.7	17.4	—

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Maintained schools	—	—	—	—	—	—	235.8*	263.3
6th Form colleges	—	—	—	—	—	—	242.0*	263.1

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
All schools	—	—	—	—	—	—	251.9	280.9
All FE sector	—	—	—	—	—	—	196.7	210.6
Total	—	—	—	—	—	—	232.5	254.5

Note:
In 2002, the number of points assigned to each GCE/VCE A/AS qualification and VCE Double Award changed to reflect the UCAS tariff. Figures for 2001 are provided on both bases.
An asterisk (*) in the table indicates that the differences between performance averages of maintained schools and Sixth Form Colleges are statistically significant at a 95 per cent. level. Differences between schools and colleges in their number and circumstance and differences within institutions in terms of student composition have not been taken into account in determining statistical significance.

Student Debt

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the level of student debt was in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and what projections he has made for each year up to 2010. [126815]

Alan Johnson: Borrowers are liable to repay their loans from the April following graduation or otherwise leaving their course. Students who started their course from the 1998/99 academic year will repay income contingent loans. Loans for those who started their course before 1998/99 are repayable on a mortgage style basis. The table shows estimates of average student loan debt at the point at which they entered repayment status for borrowers who became liable to repay their loans in financial years 2000–01 to 2002–03.

New student support arrangements were introduced from academic year 1998/99. Most new students in that year (apart from specified exceptions) received support for maintenance expenditure through means-tested grants (about 25 per cent. of the support available) and non means-tested student loans (about 75 per cent. of the support). From 1999/2000, students who entered higher education after 1998/99 received support for maintenance expenditure through loans. About three quarters of the value of these loans is not subject to means-testing. The repayments on these loans are on an income contingent basis.

Students who started their course up to 1997/98, and those who entered in 1998/99 under the existing arrangements, are eligible for mortgage style loans; the ratio of support for these students is roughly 50 per cent. means-tested grant and 50 per cent. non means-tested loan.

The first cohort of students on a three-year degree course who entered higher education under the new student support arrangements became liable for repayment in April 2002. That, and earlier, cohorts includes a disproportionate number of students on shorter courses as well as those who have left higher education before completing their courses. Therefore the average level of debt will not be representative of the average debt experienced by those who complete their courses.

	Average student loan debt on entering repayment status[1,2]	
Financial year entered repayment status[3]	*Mortgage style loans*[4] *(£)*	*Income contingent loans*[5] *(£)*
2000–01	3,920	2,340
2001–02	4,500	3,530
2002–03	5,160	6,000

[1] Data rounded to nearest 10. Includes Interest.

[2] Excludes any repayments which may have been made before borrowers enter repayment status.

[3] Borrowers enter repayment status in the April following their graduation or otherwise leaving their course.

[4] Loans made to students who entered higher education up to 1997/98 or who entered in 1998/99 under existing arrangements. Includes loans repayable to the private sector following the sale of two portfolios of student loans.

[5] Loans, repayable on an income contingent basis, available to students who entered higher education from academic year 1998/99. These loans were subject to a repayment holiday until April 2000. Includes hardship loans and the fixed rate loans (£500) to eligible part-time students.

Source:
Student Loans Company

Data on debts for which there is no public subsidy, such as overdrafts and credit cards, and informal debts to family and friends, are not held centrally.

Future student debt will depend on a range of factors, including the amount of loan students take out. After 2005/06, debt will be influenced by the borrowing behaviour of those students eligible for the HE grant. After 2006/07, student debt will also depend on the fee levels charged by universities to their full-time undergraduates, and the extent to which those students exercise the new option to defer those fees.

Student Finance

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of students completed a gap year before entering higher education in each year since 1990 in *(a)* each local education authority and *(b)* England. [122979]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The available information comes from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and covers deferred entry for full-time accepted applicants to first degree and HND study in the UK. Figures are in the table. Students who defer their application to UCAS because they are taking a gap year are therefore excluded.

Proportion of English domiciled accepted applicants deferring entry to full-time degree and HND courses, by LEA—Entry in autumn 1994 to autumn 2002

Percentage

	Year of entry								
LEA	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Avon[1]	7.8	8.7	10.1	6.7	—	—	—	—	—
Barking	2.8	4.2	3.8	3.7	3.4	4.3	4.8	6.1	5.5
Barnet	10.3	11.4	8.8	11.1	9.8	10.7	11.7	12.4	10.3
Barnsley	1.8	1.5	3.8	2.5	3.0	3.9	3.0	4.1	4.0
Bath and NE Somerset[1]	—	—	—	12.6	12.0	12.5	13.0	19.3	18.2
Bedfordshire[1]	4.9	6.1	5.6	6.3	8.5	7.9	9.4	9.1	9.2
Berkshire[1]	8.4	8.9	9.0	8.9	8.0	—	—	—	—
Bexley	2.4	4.9	4.7	5.4	5.8	6.1	5.4	4.1	5.6
Birmingham	4.0	3.9	5.1	4.3	5.4	4.6	5.3	5.2	6.0
Blackburn with Darwen[1]	—	—	—	—	3.2	4.1	3.0	4.0	3.9
Blackpool[1]	—	—	—	—	3.4	3.8	4.2	4.1	3.3
Bolton	2.1	2.3	3.8	2.4	2.8	2.9	3.8	4.9	5.2
Bournemouth[1]	—	—	—	6.9	9.2	6.6	10.2	11.7	9.1
Bracknell Forest[1]	—	—	—	—	11.8	9.1	8.6	9.7	8.8
Bradford	3.4	3.8	4.7	4.1	4.1	5.4	5.3	5.9	5.6
Brent	3.9	3.9	3.9	4.3	4.1	4.2	4.2	4.5	4.6
Brighton and Hove[1]	—	—	—	9.9	8.0	10.0	10.2	12.4	14.0
Bristol, City of[1]	—	—	—	10.8	11.2	12.7	13.4	15.4	17.6
Bromley	6.8	5.5	8.3	7.7	8.8	8.8	10.4	11.1	10.6
Buckinghamshire[1]	8.0	9.4	10.2	11.8	11.6	11.3	12.9	14.8	13.9
Bury	3.6	4.2	4.1	5.2	4.6	4.2	5.4	6.5	6.4
Calderdale	2.2	5.4	5.5	5.6	5.5	4.7	5.1	7.3	6.3
Cambridgeshire[1]	9.4	9.8	11.1	9.6	12.5	11.8	12.9	13.1	14.1
Camden	9.9	10.3	10.3	9.1	8.4	9.9	8.7	10.0	9.6
Cheshire[1]	3.4	5.0	5.1	5.6	6.0	5.5	7.1	7.8	8.3
City of London[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cleveland[1]	2.8	3.6	3.5	2.2	—	—	—	—	—
Cornwall (inc. Isles of Scilly)	6.3	6.6	7.3	8.0	8.8	8.3	9.3	10.2	10.7
Coventry	3.2	2.9	3.5	4.2	5.1	5.1	5.8	5.0	5.3
Croydon	5.6	5.7	7.3	6.2	6.5	6.8	6.8	7.0	7.1
Cumbria	5.5	5.8	7.8	5.7	6.7	6.9	8.7	9.5	9.4
Darlington[1]	—	—	—	3.2	4.6	6.3	4.4	6.5	5.7
Derby[1]	—	—	—	4.5	4.4	5.1	5.7	6.6	5.2
Derbyshire[1]	4.4	4.1	5.4	5.2	5.4	6.2	6.3	7.6	6.6
Devon[1]	7.9	9.3	9.8	10.3	12.2	13.4	13.7	16.3	15.9
Doncaster	2.0	3.1	2.2	3.4	3.4	3.3	4.4	4.0	3.3
Dorset[1]	6.4	8.2	8.8	10.1	10.9	11.3	11.8	12.2	12.9
Dudley	2.4	3.1	4.5	2.8	3.5	4.7	3.9	5.4	4.2
Durham[1]	3.1	3.9	3.3	3.6	4.1	3.9	4.8	4.5	4.7
Ealing	4.1	4.8	4.8	4.2	5.8	6.0	5.2	6.0	7.2
East Riding of Yorkshire[1]	—	—	—	6.1	5.2	5.3	5.2	6.6	5.6
East Sussex[1]	10.1	9.3	11.6	10.2	11.2	11.3	13.4	16.1	14.8
Enfield	3.8	4.7	5.0	3.9	5.0	5.6	4.9	6.7	6.4
Essex[1]	5.8	7.0	7.1	6.8	8.8	8.6	8.8	10.9	9.3
Gateshead	3.5	2.0	2.8	2.5	3.6	2.1	2.6	3.8	3.0
Gloucestershire	7.3	9.1	9.9	8.1	10.3	11.3	12.0	12.5	14.3
Greenwich	6.4	7.1	6.9	7.0	8.2	7.0	6.9	7.3	7.4
Hackney	3.8	4.6	5.4	4.5	6.0	6.2	6.5	5.9	7.1
Halton[1]	—	—	—	—	5.4	3.3	2.6	3.4	3.9
Hammersmith and Fulham	8.0	9.7	8.5	6.6	7.7	9.0	9.9	8.3	9.9
Hampshire[1]	6.6	7.1	8.1	8.1	9.1	10.1	10.7	12.1	11.9
Haringey	5.2	6.2	6.7	7.2	7.5	7.8	6.9	8.6	10.0
Harrow	5.9	6.1	6.0	5.6	6.4	6.4	6.7	7.9	6.6
Hartlepool[1]	—	—	—	2.6	1.2	3.2	2.7	3.8	2.6
Havering	3.4	4.7	5.6	5.6	6.2	7.9	6.8	8.2	7.0
Hereford and Worcester[1]	7.3	9.3	9.7	8.5	8.7	—	—	—	—
Herefordshire[1]	—	—	—	—	11.5	12.3	8.0	12.2	14.2
Hertfordshire	7.6	7.6	7.7	9.2	9.7	9.7	9.5	10.5	11.2
Hillingdon	4.9	6.2	4.4	5.5	6.3	4.8	4.9	6.1	6.5
Hounslow	4.0	4.4	4.8	5.4	6.2	6.3	5.3	5.8	4.7
Humberside[1]	4.4	4.1	4.9	2.4	—	—	—	—	—
Isle of Wight	6.4	7.5	9.2	7.2	4.8	7.0	9.8	10.6	10.7
Islington	9.1	7.7	7.9	8.1	6.6	8.3	10.0	9.1	10.5
Kensington and Chelsea	9.4	9.2	9.2	9.1	8.5	10.3	11.6	10.0	12.5
Kent[1]	6.7	7.9	9.2	8.3	10.2	10.5	10.4	12.0	11.7
Kingston	8.7	6.9	9.0	6.8	8.1	9.3	10.4	12.4	11.1
Kingston upon Hull, City of[1]	—	—	—	4.0	3.4	4.7	5.1	4.6	4.4
Kirklees	3.5	4.0	3.6	4.3	4.0	5.3	5.1	4.9	5.1

Proportion of English domiciled accepted applicants deferring entry to full-time degree and HND courses, by LEA—Entry in autumn 1994 to autumn 2002

Percentage

	Year of entry								
LEA	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Knowsley	0.5	1.9	3.3	2.6	3.5	3.6	3.4	2.7	3.0
Lambeth	5.1	6.7	6.2	6.1	6.6	6.2	7.0	8.4	7.7
Lancashire[1]	3.3	3.2	3.7	3.4	4.1	4.1	4.9	4.6	5.2
Leeds	4.2	5.4	6.8	7.0	6.3	7.2	7.3	7.6	7.8
Leicester[1]	—	—	—	2.5	3.2	2.6	3.8	3.3	3.8
Leicestershire[1]	4.2	4.9	5.1	5.0	6.6	6.3	7.1	6.5	7.2
Lewisham	6.1	6.8	7.7	6.6	7.0	5.7	8.3	8.0	7.0
Lincolnshire	4.9	6.4	7.1	7.4	7.0	8.0	7.7	9.0	7.6
Liverpool	2.7	2.8	3.5	2.5	3.2	2.9	3.3	4.3	3.9
Luton[1]	—	—	—	3.6	3.9	3.3	4.3	4.1	4.3
Manchester	3.8	3.5	4.2	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.4	5.0	5.5
Medway[1]	—	—	—	—	5.2	5.5	5.8	7.1	6.4
Merton	6.8	7.1	7.5	6.1	9.6	7.7	8.9	8.7	11.4
Middlesbrough[1]	—	—	—	3.1	3.1	3.9	3.3	3.3	2.9
Milton Keynes[1]	—	—	—	7.1	8.0	9.0	10.9	10.3	10.1
Newcastle upon Tyne	6.0	5.0	4.4	4.3	4.3	3.3	5.3	5.2	6.0
Newham	1.6	1.8	2.7	2.2	3.1	2.8	3.6	3.7	4.1
Norfolk	7.0	8.5	9.6	9.0	10.5	10.3	10.6	12.1	12.2
North Lincolnshire[1]	—	—	—	3.6	3.6	1.8	4.7	3.9	4.4
North East Lincolnshire[1]	—	—	—	4.2	2.9	2.9	4.3	3.9	2.9
North Somerset[1]	—	—	—	9.7	9.5	9.6	13.0	12.5	16.8
North Tyneside	3.1	3.7	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.9	4.4	3.9	4.0
North Yorkshire[1]	6.7	7.3	9.0	7.8	7.2	8.7	8.9	9.4	10.3
Northamptonshire	5.2	7.0	6.4	7.9	7.8	8.4	9.1	10.1	10.5
Northumberland	4.6	4.1	5.4	4.5	4.0	5.1	5.6	6.5	6.8
Nottingham[1]	—	—	—	—	4.0	5.5	7.6	5.6	6.0
Nottinghamshire[1]	5.0	5.6	5.3	6.0	6.4	6.1	7.2	7.6	8.2
Oldham	3.1	3.3	3.4	3.0	3.7	4.0	3.1	4.8	4.8
Oxfordshire	10.5	12.8	13.8	12.8	12.5	13.1	14.8	16.1	15.7
Peterborough[1]	—	—	—	—	7.8	6.9	12.0	6.6	8.0
Plymouth[1]	—	—	—	—	5.1	6.9	8.4	8.2	8.3
Poole[1]	—	—	—	7.0	9.7	7.7	11.0	9.2	7.9
Portsmouth[1]	—	—	—	6.4	5.7	6.3	7.5	9.5	7.1
Reading[1]	—	—	—	—	11.3	10.5	12.4	10.7	13.8
Redbridge	3.6	4.1	5.1	4.8	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.4	5.0
Redcar and Cleveland[1]	—	—	—	2.0	3.9	2.2	3.5	2.2	3.1
Richmond	13.2	12.0	12.9	11.3	12.2	13.8	14.4	14.5	14.8
Rochdale	2.3	2.7	4.3	3.6	4.0	3.7	3.1	4.4	3.6
Rotherham	1.6	2.0	3.5	3.6	3.8	3.8	3.5	4.3	5.1
Rutland[1]	—	—	—	11.8	12.3	20.1	16.8	12.4	14.6
Salford	3.4	4.6	3.5	6.3	4.0	5.7	7.2	4.6	5.7
Sandwell	1.4	1.5	2.6	1.7	2.5	2.2	2.4	3.8	3.1
Sefton	3.2	3.0	3.7	2.5	4.6	4.4	4.3	5.5	4.4
Sheffield	4.9	5.0	5.0	5.7	6.4	7.0	7.2	8.1	9.1
Shropshire[1]	5.6	6.2	6.7	7.4	7.9	7.2	9.1	8.4	10.7
Slough[1]	—	—	—	—	3.7	3.3	4.4	4.6	3.7
Solihull	5.1	4.5	6.4	5.5	6.5	6.2	7.3	7.7	6.7
Somerset	8.6	8.5	10.8	10.4	10.4	11.2	12.3	14.4	14.9
South Gloucestershire[1]	—	—	—	8.5	8.5	9.6	10.3	10.2	11.6
South Tyneside	2.0	1.6	2.8	1.4	1.9	2.0	3.0	4.7	1.2
Southampton[1]	—	—	—	4.7	6.1	7.8	7.3	7.2	9.8
Southend on Sea[1]	—	—	—	—	7.2	8.0	7.5	9.9	8.8
Southwark	6.3	5.8	6.6	5.7	5.9	7.4	7.3	6.8	5.8
St. Helens	1.3	1.8	1.9	1.9	2.0	2.7	3.2	2.9	3.2
Staffordshire[1]	3.4	3.2	3.7	4.4	5.0	4.4	4.6	5.7	5.4
Stockport	3.7	3.9	4.6	4.6	4.6	5.1	6.4	7.9	6.9
Stockton on Tees[1]	—	—	—	3.1	2.0	3.7	4.2	3.2	4.7
Stoke-on-Trent[1]	—	—	—	2.2	2.5	2.9	2.9	3.8	2.2
Suffolk	8.8	8.7	11.4	9.2	10.5	10.3	11.2	12.2	12.6
Sunderland	2.2	2.7	1.4	3.0	1.9	2.0	2.8	3.3	2.9
Surrey	8.5	10.2	10.0	10.3	11.0	9.9	11.5	12.8	14.2
Sutton	5.1	7.7	6.3	8.7	5.4	9.5	6.7	7.9	8.5
Swindon[1]	—	—	—	7.4	8.0	7.2	9.6	8.7	7.6
Tameside	1.5	2.1	3.3	2.4	3.6	3.5	4.1	4.5	4.1
Telford and the Wrekin[1]	—	—	—	—	5.7	5.5	6.1	5.2	8.6
Thurrock[1]	—	—	—	—	4.8	9.0	6.7	8.0	8.3
Torbay[1]	—	—	—	—	9.2	9.8	8.6	9.7	11.7
Tower Hamlets	3.9	3.5	4.0	2.8	3.0	3.5	5.1	2.3	2.8

Proportion of English domiciled accepted applicants deferring entry to full-time degree and HND courses, by LEA—Entry in autumn 1994 to autumn 2002

Percentage

	Year of entry								
LEA	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Trafford	3.8	5.6	3.8	4.4	5.3	5.0	5.5	7.4	5.9
Wakefield	4.3	2.5	3.5	4.9	3.9	4.6	4.7	3.9	5.6
Walsall	4.0	1.8	3.0	3.1	3.5	2.7	2.8	3.1	3.7
Waltham Forest	3.1	4.2	3.6	4.0	3.6	4.5	5.3	5.3	4.5
Wandsworth	11.3	7.4	9.5	8.5	8.2	9.9	11.0	11.9	11.7
Warrington[1]	—	—	—	—	4.3	4.9	4.2	7.0	5.8
Warwickshire	5.7	7.2	6.9	7.1	7.7	8.1	8.3	9.9	10.0
West Berkshire[1]	—	—	—	—	15.5	14.6	14.3	16.6	16.1
West Sussex	9.0	10.4	11.1	9.7	11.4	12.1	12.4	13.6	12.3
Westminster	7.6	7.2	6.3	6.7	6.0	7.0	6.0	7.6	8.7
Wigan	2.5	2.2	2.6	3.5	4.1	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.2
Wiltshire[1]	8.8	10.9	11.3	12.9	11.5	13.0	13.9	15.9	15.8
Windsor and Maidenhead[1]	—	—	—	—	15.2	10.7	10.0	11.6	13.5
Wirral	3.0	3.3	3.3	3.5	3.6	4.2	5.3	4.8	6.2
Wokingham[1]					8.5	11.0	9.2	11.8	9.9
Wolverhampton	1.7	2.3	1.7	2.7	2.7	3.0	4.0	3.8	3.6
Worcestershire[1]	—	—	—	—	9.2	7.6	8.6	9.8	9.9
York[1]	—	—	—	7.7	7.7	8.7	10.3	12.6	12.0
Total England	5.7	6.4	6.9	6.7	7.2	7.4	8.0	8.7	8.8

[1] There are discontinuities in the time series caused by Local Government Reorganisations. Also, UCAS do not hold domicile breakdowns for all new authorities in the year that reorganisation took place and so some participation rates for new authorities are not shown.

[2] The effect of year on year fluctuations on a small population mean that this method of calculating participation rates is unreliable for the City of London.

Note:

Accepted applicants with unknown English domiciles are excluded from the figures.

Source:

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

Student Loan Company

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what redress a student has who suffers hardship as a result of maladministration by the Student Loans Company Ltd; and if he will investigate the case of Mr. Lloyd Hughes, a constituent. [126368]

Alan Johnson: If a student has lodged a complaint through the Student Loans Company (SLC) complaints procedure and is not happy with the response he may request that the case be reviewed by the SLC Chief Executive. If the Chief Executive reviews the case and the student is still dissatisfied he may ask for the case to be investigated by the Independent Assessor. The SLC's complaints procedure is published in a leaflet and on its website.

The Independent Assessor has, within his terms of reference, the power to recommend that the SLC, by way of compensation, awards a sum of up to £5,000, for any loss, expense or unreasonable degree of inconvenience suffered by the complainant.

My officials are currently liaising with SLC regarding Mr. Hughes' case.

Student Loans

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 3 July, *Official Report*, column 439–40W, what the value is of student loans where repayments have been made early in each year since the scheme began; and what the amount is as a percentage of the total amount repaid. [126081]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* The value of student loans in the UK where repayments have been made earlier than required since the beginning of the scheme, and the percentage this represents of the total amount repaid are shown in the table:

Financial year	*Repaid earlier than required[1,2] (£ million)*	*Repaid earlier than required as a percentage of all repayments[1,2,4]*
1990–91	[5]	[5]
1991–92	0.9	75
1992–93	2.8	47
1993–94	5.0	35
1994–95	6.5	24
1995–96	10.7	21
1996–97	18.1	21
1997–98[3]	28.9	22
1998–99[3]	25.7	19
1999–2000[3,6]	33.4	26
2000–01[2,3,6,7]	43.2	24
2001–02[2,3,6,7]	63.9	24

[1] The table covers both mortgage style and income contingent loans. Early repayments of Income Contingent loans are made directly to the Student Loans Company whether or not the borrower is making repayments through the taxation system.

[2] There is a discontinuity in the time series due to a change in the Student Loans Company's business process in December 2000; early repayments include those which do not necessarily settle the account in full.

[3] Two portfolios of student loans to the value of just over £2 billion have been sold to the private sector in March 1998 and March 1999. The figures in the table relate to the publicly owned debt only.

[4] Repayments of income contingent loans through the tax system are reported at the time when Student Loans Company is notified of the repayments by Inland Revenue, which may be one of more years after the tax year they relate to.
[5] Not applicable
[6] Discontinuity in time series
[7] Provisional.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 3 July, *Official Report*, column 439–40W, what the total value is of student loans where repayment has been deferred in each year since the scheme began. [126082]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* The table shows the cumulative balance at the start of each financial year of mortgage style student loans in the UK and in public ownership where repayment has been deferred. There is no concept of deferment from those with income contingent loans who repay through the tax system—repayments are not collected from those earning below the threshold, i.e. £10,000 in financial year 2001–02.

Financial year	*Balance in Deferment (£ million)*
1990–91	[3]—
1991–92	[4]
1992–93	[4]
1993–94	[4]
1994–95	40
1995–96	118
1996–97	247
1997–98	468
1997–98	468
1998–99	447
1999–2000	466
2000–01[5]	672
2001–02[5]	909

[1] The table shows the cumulative balance of loans in deferment at the start of each financial year; the balance is the amount of dererment and the sum not yet due for repayment but excluding any amount repaid. For loans deferred with arrears, the value of arrears has been excluded.
[2] Two portfolios of student loans to the value of just over £2 billion have been sold to the private sector in March 1998 and March 1999. The figures in the table relate to the public debt only.
[3] not applicable.
[4] not available.
[5] Provisional.
Source:
Student Loans Company

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 3 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 439–40W, what the total value is of loans where inability to repay has been cancelled in each year since the scheme began. [126083]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* The table shows the total value of student loans in the UK and in public ownership which have been written off or cancelled in each financial year.

Financial year	*Amount written off/cancelled[1,2,3] (£ million)*
1990–91	[4]—
1991–92	[5]—
1992–93	0.1
1993–94	0.2
1994–95	0.3
1995–96	0.5
1996–97	0.9
1997–98	1.0
1998–99 of which:	0.9
Income contingent loans	[6]—
1999–2000[7] of which:	1.2
Income contingent loans	[5]—
2000–01[8] of which:	1.1
Income contingent loans	0.2
2001–02[8] of which:	1.4
Income contingent loans	0.4

[1] The table shows the value of loans cancelled or written off during each financial year.
[2] Two portfolios of student loans to the value of just over £2 billion have been sold to the private sector in March 1998 and March 1999. The figures in the table relate to the public debt only.
[3] A cancelled loan is one where the borrower no longer has any liability to repay as set out by legislation. A borrower's liability to repay shall be cancelled: on death of the borrower; after 25 years or when the borrower reaches the age of 50 (60 if the borrower was aged over 40 when he/she last borrowed), whichever is the earlier, provided the borrower is not in default; and if the borrower is in receipt of a disability related benefit and permanently unfit for work. A written off loan is one where the borrower remains liable to repay but recovery is deemed unlikely by the loan administrator or not possible by legal judgment.
[4] Not applicable.
[5] Nil/negligible.
[6] Not available.
[7] Amounts written off in 1999–2000 include some transactions which relate to the previous financial year.
[8] Provisional.

Students

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of students dropped out after *(a)* one year, *(b)* two years, *(c)* three years and *(d)* before the completion of their course in each university in the latest year for which figures are available. [118128]

Alan Johnson: The available information on the non-continuation of students beyond the first year in each university, and the projected course non-completion rate in each university is contained in "Performance Indicators in Higher Education in the UK" published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, a copy of which is available from the House Library. The latest edition, published in December 2002, gives figures for students starting full-time degree courses in the United Kingdom in 1999/2000. Table 3 shows rates of non-continuation after the first year of study and Table 5 gives drop out rates across the full course.

No data are held covering those students who drop out of their course after two or three years.

Nationally, the non-completion rate has remained broadly the same at 17–18 per cent. since 1991/92, a period of considerable expansion of student numbers.

Figures published in 2002 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) show that the UK has one of the lowest non-completion rates among OECD countries.

Sure Start

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what studies have been undertaken

about the means and methods to sustain Sure Start projects deemed beneficial when the money under that programme is no longer available for such projects; what replacement programme for Sure Start is envisaged when that is *(a)* running down and *(b)* completed in an area; and if he will make a statement. [125545]

Margaret Hodge: A national evaluation of Sure Start local programmes (SSLPs) began in January 2001 and is due to run until July 2008. Each SSLP also undertakes its own local evaluation.

Both levels of evaluation will provide information on the effectiveness of local programmes in the short, medium and long-term, identifying examples of good practice and factors associated with the longer-term sustainability of Sure Start local programmes.

Each SSLP receives funding for up to 10 years and is expected to develop a strategy to maintain improved child outcomes as the additional financial contribution declines, including helping mainstream services to implement the lessons from Sure Start. Many SSLPs will form the basis of Children's Centres in their areas.

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much of the latest departmental underspend was accounted for by the Sure Start programme. [125991]

Mr. Miliband: My department's expenditure outturn was published in the Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper on 16 July (command number 5884).

The Department's resources are allocated on a 3 year basis by the Treasury. Departments are allowed to carry forward any unused funds from one year to the next to ensure the most effective use of funds and to recognise the fact that expenditure patterns on some activities, including on capital funding, can be difficult to predict.

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Sure Start schemes were completed in each year since 1999; what the annual spending on Sure Start programmes has been in each year since 1998; what plans he has for the expansion of the Sure Start programme; and if he will make a statement. [125992]

Margaret Hodge: Each Sure Start local programme (SSLP) receives funding for up to 10 years and is expected to develop a strategy to maintain improved child outcomes as the additional financial contribution declines, including helping mainstream services to implement the lessons from Sure Start. We will also build on programmes like Sure Start, Neighbourhood Nurseries and Early Excellence Centres to create a network of children's centres in disadvantaged areas providing good quality integrated childcare with early education, family and health services, and training and employment advice, for at least 650,000 children and their families.

Table 1 provides information on the number of SSLPs and the date they were announced. Table 2 provides an annual breakdown of SSLPs spending since the inception of the programme in 1999–00 through to 2002–03.

Table 1

Date announced	*SSLPs*
19 January 1999	59
15 November 1999	69
13 July 2000	65
31 January 2000	67
17 July 2000	179
14 May 2000	85
Total SSLPs	524

Table 2

Financial year	*SSLPs spend £ million*
1999–2000	5
2000–01	56
2001–02	134
2002–03	216
Total SSLPs spend	411

Teacher Redundancies

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 633W, on teacher redundancies, what the reasons were for the delay in answering the question; at what level information on redundancies is collected centrally; if he will place that information in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [125772]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 14 July 2003]*: The answer to the hon. Member's earlier question was being processed in the usual way and was answered at the earliest opportunity. Provisional statistics on teacher numbers and teacher vacancies at January 2003 were published in April in Statistical First Release 10/2003. In May this year, in response to concerns about the difficulties some schools are facing as a result of changes to the funding arrangements, my Department liaised with local education authorities (LEAs) to make a broad assessment of the extent to which schools were making changes in their teaching staff complements, including making teachers redundant, and the possible reasons for such changes, including falling rolls. This was based on the best information available to local education authorities (LEAs) at that time; many told us that definitive information was not available and that the situation was changing rapidly as schools finalised their budgets and their staffing. In addition they advised that a significant number of the redundancy notices were 'protective' and were likely to be withdrawn as the situation within schools and the LEA became clearer.

Teacher Training Targets

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether his Department will use the 1996 curriculum and staffing survey data in the formulation of the 2004–05 initial teacher training targets to be announced in December. [126912]

Mr. Miliband: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to a similar question asked previously by the hon. Member, on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 353W.

Teachers' Pensions

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to raise the age at which teachers may receive their pensions. [124431]

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what discussions he has had with the Department for Work and Pensions on raising the retirement age of teachers; [124480]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on teachers of increasing the retirement age from 60 to 65. [124481]

Margaret Hodge: Following consultation on the Pensions Green Paper, which was published by the Department for Work and Pensions last December, raising the pension age for teachers and other public servants from 60 to 65 is one of the measures being taken forward. This reflects both increased life expectancy and the fact that many people want to work longer and build up their pensions.

Details of how and when the changes might be introduced for new entrants to the Teachers Pension Scheme and the transitional arrangements for existing scheme members remain to be worked out. These will be considered alongside changes to improve scheme benefits, and there will be a wide-ranging review of the scheme involving full consultation with union and employer representatives. All of the issues associated with an increase in the pension age of members of the Teachers' Pension Scheme will be considered during the review. A change for new entrants is unlikely before 2006 and will be much later for existing staff.

We have, nevertheless, given teachers five clear guarantees.

Serving teachers who are currently aged 50 and over will not be affected by changes to the existing pension arrangements.

Pension benefits earned before the new arrangements start will not be affected. Whatever changes are made will not affect pension benefits already earned from past service.

Teachers will still be able to retire at, before or after 60 as they do now. At retirement, pension and lump sum benefits will take account of the number of years of service the teacher has worked before and after the changes were introduced.

These changes will be talked through fully with teachers and their union representatives, as well as with employers. Unions will be part of this process and there will be a full consultation exercise before any changes are made to the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

Opportunities to introduce other benefits and flexibilities into the Scheme will be fully explored, particularly those that aid the transition from work to retirement.

We remain fully committed to the provision of a good quality pension scheme for teachers which is valued by the membership and which contributes effectively to the recruitment and retention of teachers.

Telecommunication Masts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many planning applications have been made to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department. [124815]

Margaret Hodge: Since August 2001, when the current planning regulations on mobile telecommunications masts came into force, there have been no planning applications and no applications for prior approval to site mobile telecommunications masts on land owned by the Department.

Tomlinson Inquiry

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress he has made with regard to article 95 of the Tomlinson Inquiry. [126491]

Mr. Miliband: A Memorandum of Understanding between the Department and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) was published on QCA's website on 19 June. A copy was placed in the Library on 18 June.

Training and Enterprise Council

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the training and enterprise councils published their final accounts; from where copies can be obtained; and if he will make a statement. [120017]

Margaret Hodge: My Department holds copies of the audited statutory accounts for all 72 TECs in England for their final financial year of operation which ended on 25 March 2001.

Transferable Key Skills

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if assessment of key skills through vocational settings will be balanced by general testing of competencies in transferable key skills. [126783]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Assessment of the key skills qualifications in Communication, Application of Number and Information Technology already combines a portfolio of evidence taken from the mainstream programme (whether vocational or academic) with a short external test.

University Admissions

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students he estimates will defer entry to university in the academic years *(a)* 2004–05, *(b)* 2005–06 and *(c)* 2006–07; and what action he will take to smooth any variation in numbers taking up their courses in those years. [126780]

Alan Johnson: The Department does not have information to forecast the number of students that will defer entry to university in the academic years in question.

We have set out our plans for funding and student numbers in the period up to 2005–06 in the HE White Paper and in the Secretary of State's Grant Letter to the Higher Education Funding Council for England. We have no plans to intervene in the normal processes of application and admissions to universities.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he has made an estimate of the number of pupils likely to attend overseas universities as a result of the impact of Office for Fair Access on UK university admissions. [118066]

Alan Johnson: The Department has made no such estimates.

The Government are committed to increasing and widening participation in higher education, and the Office of Fair Access is one of the policies that supports that goal.

University Research Ratings

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many 5 and 5* rated research departments there are in universities in Liverpool; [124214]

(2) how many full time academics in higher education institutions in the North West work in departments which face the removal or reduction of recurrent government funding for research; [125491]

(3) which subjects and how many departments in that subject in the North West's higher education institutions face *(a)* the reduction and *(b)* removal of recurrent government funding for research in 2003–04. [125492]

Alan Johnson: The University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University have a combined total of 22 departments that received a 5 or a 5* rating in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise. 1,604 research active academic staff (full time equivalents) were included in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise by higher education institutions in the North West region in departments which have had their research grants reduced or discontinued in 2003–04. In the North West region of England as a whole, the following Units of Assessment are facing a reduction of removal of research grants between 2002–03 and 2003–04. The numbers of Departments affected within each subject unit are given in brackets.

Name of Unit of Assessment:

Clinical Dentistry (2)	Economics and Econometrics (2)
Anatomy (1)	Politics and International Studies (4)
Pharmacy (1)	Social Policy and Administration (3)
Environmental Sciences (1)	Sociology (4)
Statistics and Operational Research (3)	Russian, Slavonic and East European Languages (1)
General Engineering (5)	History of Art, Architecture and Design (1)
Town and Country Planning (3)	Philosophy (5)
Geography (4)	Education (6)

University Students

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what evidence he has collated on the equity of participation by *(a)* women and *(b)* women from lower family income groups at each of the higher education providers. [117613]

Alan Johnson: The available information on all higher education enrolments by gender for 2001/02 is given in the table. The data for individual institutions is not benchmarked, i.e. it takes no account of prior attainment or subject spread. Nor does it take account of any differences there may be in the rates of application.

Figures with respect to earnings are not held centrally. The closest information available refers to social class by occupation and gender. The corresponding information for 2001/02 covering acceptances to full-time undergraduate study through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) is given in the following table. UCAS does not cover part-time undergraduates or postgraduates.

Acceptances through UCAS to full-time undergraduate study split by social class and gender, for entry in autumn 2001

Social class	*Number male*	*Percentage male*	*Number female*	*Percentage female*	*Total*
I: Professional	19,648	49.4	20,100	50.6	39,748
II: Intermediate	55,468	45.9	65,363	54.1	120,831
IIIn: Skilled Non-Manual	17,114	44.1	21,660	55.9	38,774
IIIm: Skilled Manual	23,167	47.9	25,245	52.1	48,412
IV: Partly Skilled	10,261	44.4	12,853	55.6	23,114
V: Unskilled	2,760	49.3	2,844	50.7	5,604
Unknown	24,719	50.5	24,270	49.5	48,989
Total known	128,418	46.4	148,065	53.6	276,483
Total	153,137	47.1	172,335	52.9	325,472

Source:
Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students are being taught at universities in Liverpool; how many graduates were produced in each of the last five years; and what the drop out rate was as a percentage of total numbers admitted on an annual basis for the last five years. [124213]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The latest information on students and graduates is shown in the first table

Information on completion and non-completion rates of HE students is published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 'Performance Indicators in Higher Education'. The latest data available are shown in the second following table. Figures for students starting courses in 2000–01 will be published in December 2003.

Figures published in 2002 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) show that the UK as a whole has one of the lowest non-completion rates among OECD countries.

All students in Liverpool institutions[1]

		1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–2*
Liverpool John Moores University	Enrolments	20,425	20,590	20,130	20,665	21,565
	Graduates	3,365	3,490	3,250	3,580	3,435
The University of Liverpool	Enrolments	18,310	19,600	20,010	22,450	22,200
	Graduates	2,790	2,740	2,780	2,995	3,220

[1] Environment figures are based on a census count as at 1 December and cover all full-time and part-time home and overseas students on postgraduates courses. Graduates figures cover students completing full-time and part-time first degree courses.

Projected learning outcomes full-time student starting first degree courses

	Projected Outcomes[1]		
Students starting in	*Obtained degree*	*Other qualifications*[2]	*Obtained no qualification*
Liverpool John Moores University			
1996–97	73	7	20
1997–98	75	5	20
1998–99	74	7	19
1999–2000	71	7	22
University of Liverpool			
1996–97	87	5	8
1997–98	84	6	10
1998–99	84	6	10
1999–2000	89	4	7

[1] The projected outcomes are calculated on the assumption that the progression paths of new entrants will be the same as those for students currently in the system.
[2] Includes students who obtain undergraduates qualifications other than a degree (e.g an HND).

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Department since 29 October 2002. [126608]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: 28.

Youth Unemployment

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many 16 to 18-year-olds are not in education, employment or training; what percentage of 16 to 18-year-olds this represents; and what the figures were for each of the past 10 years. [120528]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The numbers and percentages of 16 to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) for 1992 to 2001 (as at end of calendar year) are set out in the table. The figures for end 2001 are provisional.

16 to 18-year-olds NEET in England

Year end	*Number (Thousand)*	*Percentage*
1992	197	11
1993	173	10
1994	152	9
1995	159	9
1996	169	10
1997	170	9
1998	183	10
1999	156	9
2000	172	9
2001	173	9

Note:
The percentages do not include any revisions following the 2001 census

These estimates are taken from the latest annual statistical first release, 'SFR 16/2002: Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16–18 Year Olds in England: 2000 and 2001'.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Speeding

John Barrett: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how much money was raised from fines for speeding caught on speed cameras, in each year since 1997. [124073]

Mr. Leslie: The information available relates to England and Wales and only to those cameras covered by the special schemes introduced in April 2002, to facilitate investment in safety cameras. In 2003–03, the revenue from these cameras was £73 million.

Revenues are initially collected by the magistrates courts, part of which is transferred to the Department for Transport to cover the assessed cost of operating the schemes. Of the £73 million, approximately £66 million was transferred to the Department for Transport for distribution to the various partnerships of the scheme in England and Wales and approximately £7 million was paid to the Consolidated Fund.

Children (Paternal Access)

Mr. Soley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the powers of the courts to enforce paternal access to children following relationship breakdown; and if he will make a statement. [125801]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

The courts already have powers under the Children Act 1998 to respond to any refusal to obey the court order for contact. The High Court and county court may impose a fixed prison sentence, not exceeding two years (two months in the magistrates court). A fine not exceeding £2,500 may also be imposed. The court may also change the residence of the child from one parent to the other. In considering any penalty, the courts take into account its likely impact on the child's welfare. The Government acknowledges that it is unsatisfactory for contact orders to be flouted with impunity and for children to be denied contact with one of their parents, when the court has found this to be in their interests.

In response to the "Making Contact Work" report of the Children Act Sub-Committee (CASC) of the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Board on Family Law, the Government have been reviewing current enforcement mechanisms. A final response to this report will be published later in the summer.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

Julie Morgan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what progress has been made by CAFCASS in Wales in tackling the waiting list for guardian ad litem cases. [120956]

Margaret Hodge: Progress is being made by CAFCASS in managing and reducing the waiting list of public law cases dealt with by Guardians in Wales. CAFCASS has developed a protocol with local Social Services to avoid delays, including a system for prioritising waiting lists, continuing to recruit frontline staff and training of its officers to work on both public and private law cases which will increase the flexibility of its workforce. If workloads do not increase above current levels, the aim is that waiting lists will be cleared by March 2004.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what estimate he has made of the cost that will be incurred in departmental name changes consequent on the creation of the department; and what he estimates the total costs associated with the creation of his new Department will be. [123349]

Mr. Lammy: The Department for Constitutional Affairs estimates that the costs that will be incurred in changing the Department's name are around £40,000. This covers e-mail and website changes, stationery and signage. It is too soon to give an accurate estimate of the total costs associated with the creation of the new Department.

Departmental Policies

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what policies *(a)* initiated and *(b)* managed by his Department and its predecessor since 2001 have had an impact on Pendle; and if he will make a statement. [124092]

Mr. Lammy: The Department for Constitutional Affairs, and before it the Lord Chancellor's Department, is responsible for the administration of the courts and tribunals, for legal services, civil and family law and for a range of constitutional matters. We are improving the management and effectiveness of the services we provide and are responding to customer needs, including working closely with other agencies to ensure the effective delivery of justice, a fair and effective system of civil and administrative law, to protect the vulnerable, to increase consumer choice in legal services, to modernise the constitution and to ensure proper access to information by citizens.

The East Lancashire with Blackburn Community Legal Service (CLS) Partnership, which includes the area covered by Pendle parliamentary constituency, has been set up to improve local access to good quality legal and advice services. In particular, funding from the second round of the Partnership Initiative Budget (£136,000) will allow Pendle Citizens Advice Bureau to develop a rural information service to communities across the Pendle area.

EU Committees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs, if he will list *(a)* the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU committee on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, *(b)* the number of times, and the dates, on which it has met since January 2002, *(c)* the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, *(d)* the decisions it has made since January 2002 and *(e)* the means used to communicate the decisions to the House. [110312]

Mr. Lammy: This is the committee of representatives of EU member states' Governments that is established by Article 31 of the EC Data Protection Directive (95/46/EC). The UK representation is provided by an official from my Department. Since January 2002, the committee has met six times: on 8 February 2002, 6 and 7 June 2002, 12 December 2002, 21 February 2003, 15 and 16 May 2003 and 11 July 2003. The committee makes no decisions. Its function is to assist the European Commission in the decisions that the Commission takes relating to the adequacy of data protection in countries outside the EU. Since January 2002 the committee has given favourable opinions on draft Commission decisions that Argentina and Guernsey provide adequate data protection. The committee has also had preliminary discussions of other matters that could lead to Commission decisions, such as the Commission's current discussions with the United States' authorities about the disclosure of airline passenger information. The Commission keeps the committee informed about a wide range of matters relating to data protection. These have included: the activities of the working party of data protection supervisory authorities set up under Article 29 of the Directive; the appointment of the European Data Protection Supervisor; and the Commission's first report on the implementation of the Directive.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many officials in the Lord Chancellor's Department serve on EU committees or working parties. [116088]

Mr. Lammy: Membership of EU Committees, Working Parties and Working Groups is not fixed, therefore, depending on the subject matter under consideration, the most appropriate policy officials attend meetings of EU Committees, Working Parties and Working Groups. Information on the overall number of policy officials who are required to attend EU Committees, Working Parties and Working Groups is not held.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by his Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if he will make a statement. [126007]

Mr. Leslie: The Department for Constitutional Affairs came into existence on 12 June 2003. Its predecessor, the Lord Chancellor's Department, had outsourced two IT contracts since 1997 and both are on-going. The first with CSL who now trade as Liberata was let in December 1997, the second with ICL who now trade as Fujitsu Services was let in December 1998.

The estimated value of the contract with Liberata is £205 million and has not been re-negotiated. This contract is for financial and accounting services and a supported desktop service and infrastructure.

The estimated value of the contract with Fujitsu Services is £232 million and was re-negotiated in May 2000 and again in July 2002. This contract is designed to provide a modern national infrastructure to the magistrates courts service and a replacement case management system.

Judges

Mr. Cash: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs whether he plans to amend the provisions relating to judges' *(a)* security of tenure, *(b)* salaries and pensions and *(c)* discipline. [126748]

Mr. Leslie: There are no plans to amend the security of tenure of Judges.

Paragraph 99 of the consultation paper "Constitutional Reform: A New Way of Appointing Judges" published on 14 July explains that responsibility for Judicial pay and pensions will remain a matter for the Government but that there could be a role for the proposed Judicial Appointments Commission in giving evidence to the Review Body on Senior Salaries on the appropriate level of Judicial salaries.

Options for the future arrangements for the discipline of judges are discussed in detail in paragraphs 100–108 of the consultation paper. A copy of this paper is in the Member's library, and can also be found on the internet at www.dca.gov.uk/consult/jacommission/.

Queen's Counsel

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will abolish the QC system; and if he will make a statement. [120009]

Mr. Leslie: I refer my hon. Friend to the response given by my noble and learned Friend the Secretary of State and Lord Chancellor, the Lord Falconer of Thoroton, in response to a question from Earl Ferrers, on 16 June 2003, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column 522. I also refer my hon. Friend to the written answer given by my noble and learned Friend on 19 June 2003, column WA131 as to the timetable for consultation on this issue.

Race Relations

Angela Eagle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what progress has been made in the Lord Chancellor's Department and non-departmental public bodies on implementing the requirements of the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000; and if he will publish the results of the monitoring required by the Act. [117472]

Mr. Lammy: The Department for Constitutional Affairs is fully committed to providing equality of opportunity and valuing diversity in everything it does. Our Race Equality Scheme was published by the Lord Chancellor's Department (as it then was) in May 2002 and sets out the action the Department will take to meet its statutory duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The Scheme identifies the policies and functions of the Department that have a high relevance to meeting the general statutory duty and outlines the programme of action that is being undertaken in each case in order to meet that duty. Diversity awareness training has been provided for all permanent staff and we have incorporated diversity awareness into induction training for new staff. In accordance with the requirements of the Act we will publish a summary of the assessments, consultation exercises and monitoring we carry out and this will be included as part of the Equality and Diversity Annual Report. We will conduct a review of the Scheme in 2004 to assess which of our functions and policies are relevant to meeting the statutory duties and will publish a revised Scheme by 1 April 2005.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs on how many occasions between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [126686]

Mr. Leslie: Between 31 March 2001 and 1 April 2003 the Special Adviser in my Department travelled abroad on one occasion, at cost of £374.00 per trip. Information for the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2000 is already in the public domain. All travel by Special Advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, and the Civil Service Management Code.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Burundi

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions his Department has had with the Burundi transitional government regarding establishing a Burundian Protection Force to replace the South African troops [126402]

Mr. Mullin: The South African Government has committed troops to form the VIP protection force guarding returning exiled Hutu politicians. Under the agreement between the governments of South Africa and Burundi, the South African National Defence Force would provide training for their Burundian replacements. The implementation of this arrangement is a matter for the two governments.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions the Department has had with the Governments of *(a)* Senegal, *(b)* Nigeria and *(c)* Ghana, on the troops pledged to Burundi. [126403]

Mr. Mullin: We are in regular contact with the governments of Senegal, Nigeria and Ghana. Each would require a total ceasefire to be in place before committing troops to Burundi. An all-inclusive ceasefire has not yet been achieved. South Africa, Mozambique and Ethiopia have now committed approximately 3,000 troops to the African Union led African Mission in Burundi. We have provided £3.9 million to the Mozambican Government to help equip their contingent.

Family Visit Visas

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to ensure that would-be sponsors of refused family visit visa applicants are aware of the benefits of an oral appeal. [120759]

Mr. Mullin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 25 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 813W.

Madrid Initiative

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which UK Government officials attended the Canberra meeting on 11 July to discuss the Madrid initiative; what was *(a)* agreed and *(b)* discussed at the meeting; and when and where the next meeting will be held. [126465]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 17 July 2003]:* The meeting to discuss the proliferation and security initiative took place in Brisbane on 9 and 10 July. The UK delegation to the meeting was led by the Director for International Security at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. He was supported by officials from the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

There was wide-ranging discussion about how to take forward the initiative following on from the first meeting held in Madrid in June. The chairman of the meeting issued a statement covering the discussions. This can be found on the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) internet website at www.dfat.gov.au/globalissues.

It is likely that the next meeting will be held in France in early September.

Progressive Governance Conference

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Government Department will be financially responsible for the cost of the Progressive Governance Conference held between 11 and 14 July; and how much the event cost [126412]

Mr. Rammell: The Progressive Governance Conference from 11–13 July was organised and paid for by the think-tank Policy Network. No Government Department was involved.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office organised the Progressive Governance Summit on 13–14 July for the heads of state or government of 14 countries. The cost of organising the Summit is estimated at 130,000. Final figures will be available in due course.

Ambassadors

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many ambassadors he has appointed since 1997; and if he will list them. [125522]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Since May 1997, the following heads of mission have been appointed:

Country	*Appointed*
Afghanistan	Dr. Rosalind Marsden (Due October 2003)
	Ronald Nash LVO (May 2002)
Albania	Richard Jones (Due October 2003)
	Dr. David Landsman (July 2001)
	Dr. Peter January (March 1 999)
	Stephen Nash (May 1998)
Algeria	Graham Hand (July 2002)
	Richard Edis, deceased (September 2001)
	William Sinton (July 1999)
	Francois Gordon (November 1997)
Angola	John Thompson MBE (February 2002)
	Caroline Elms (September 1998)
Antigua and Barbuda	John White (August 2001)
	Gordon Baker (August 1 998)
Argentina	Sir Robin Christopher KBE, CMG (December 2000)
	William Marsden (July 1997)
Armenia	Thorhilda Abbott- Watt (December 2002)
	Timothy Jones (November 1999)
Australia	Sir Alastair Goodlad KCMG (May 1999)
Austria	John Macgregor CVO (April 2003)
	Antony Ford (September 2000)
Azerbaijan	Dr. Lawrence Bristow (Due December 2003)
	Andrew Tucker (November 2000)
	Roger Thomas (July 1997)
The Bahamas	Roderick Gemmell QBE (March 2003)
	Peter Heigl (July 1999)
Bahrain	Robin Lamb (Due August 2003)
	Peter Ford (April 1999)
Bangladesh	David Carter CVO (January 2000)
Barbados	John White (August 2001)
Belarus	Brian Bennett (March 2003)
	Iain Kelly (April 1999)
Belgium	Gavin Hewitt (February 2001)
Belize	Philip Priestley (July 2001)
	Timothy David (April 1998)
Bolivia	William Sinton QBE (October 2001)
	Graham Minter (August 1998)

Country	*Appointed*
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ian Cliff OBE (October 2001)
	Graham Hand (July 1998)
Botswana	David Merry CMG (August 2001)
	John Wilde (May 1998)
Brazil	Sir Roger Bone KCMG (May 1999)
Brunei	Andrew Caie (January 2002)
	Stuart Laing (July 1998)
Bulgaria	Ian Soutar (December 2001)
	Richard Stagg (July 1998)
Burma	Victoria Bowman (December 2002)
	John Jenkins (April 1999)
Cambodia	Stephen Bridges LVO (December 2000)
	Christopher Edgar (July 1997)
Cameroon	Richard Wildash LVO (June 2002)
	George Boon (February 1998)
Canada	David Reddaway CMG MBE (Due August 2003)
	Sir Andrew Burns (July 2000)
Chile	Richard Wilkinson CVO (Due August 2003)
	Greg Faulkner (April 2000)
	Dame Glynne Evans (June 1997)
China	Sir Christopher Hum KCMG (March 2001)
	Sir Anthony Galsworthy (May 1997)
Colombia	Thomas Duggin (August 2001)
	Jeremy Thorp (May 1998)
Congo (Democratic Republic)	James Atkinson (May 2000)
	Doug Scrafton (June 1998)
Costa Rica	Georgina Butler (March 2002)
	Peter Spicely (January 1999)
	Alan Green (September 1997)
Cote d'Ivoire	Francois Gordon CMG (June 2001)
	Haydon Warren-Gash (October 1997)
Croatia	Colin Munro (August 1997)
	Nicholas Jarrold (November 2000)
Cuba	Paul Hare LVO (July 2001)
	David Ridgway (July 1998)
Cyprus	Lyn Parker (September 2001)
	Edward Clay (March 1999)
Czech Republic	Anne Pringle (November 2001)
	David Broucher (October 1997)
Denmark	Sir Nicholas Browne KBE CMG (Due August 2003)
	Philip Astley (June 1999)
Dominica	John White (August 2001)
	Gordon Baker (March 1998)
Dominican Republic	Andrew Ashcroft (July 2002)
	David Ward (September 1998)
East Timor	Hamish Daniel MBE (May 2002)
Ecuador	Richard Lewington (June 2003)
	Ian Gerken (February 2000)
	John Forbes-Meyler (June 1997)
Egypt	Sir Derek Plumbly KCMG (Due September 2003)
	John Sawers (September 2001)
	Sir Graham Boyce (February 1999)
El Salvador	Patrick Morgan (July 1999)
Eritrea	Michael Murray (March 2002)
	Myles Wickstead (November 2000)
	Gordon Wetherell (September 1997)
Estonia	Nigel Haywood (Due November 2003)
	Sarah Squire (September 2000)
	Timothy Craddock (September 1997)
Ethiopia	Myles Wickstead (November 2000)
	Gordon Wetherell (November 1997)
Fiji	Charles Mochan (December 2002)
	Michael Price (October 2000)
	Michael Dibben (Decembr 1997)
Finland	Mathew Kirk (July 2002)
	Alyson Bailes (January 2001)
	Gavin Hewitt (September 1997)
France	Sir John Holmes KBE CVO CMG (October 2001)
The Gambia	Eric Jenkinson (December 2002)
	John Perrott (April 2000)
	Tony Millson (March 1998)
Georgia	Richard Jenkins (January 1998)
	Deborah Barnes Jones (April 2001)
Germany	Sir Peter Torry KCMG (May 2003)
	Sir Paul Lever (December 1997)
Ghana	Rod Pullen (October 2000)
Greece	Sir David Madden KCMG (December 1998)
Grenada	John White (August 2001)
	Gordon Baker (March 1998)

Country	*Appointed*
Guatemala	Richard Lavers (October 2001)
	Andrew Forbes (July 1998)
Guinea	David Jones (May 2000)
Guyana	Stephen Hiscock (August 2002)
	Edward Glover (November 1998)
Holy See	Kathryn Colvin (July 2002)
	Mark Pellew (January 1998)
Honduras	Kay Coombs (September 2002)
	David Osborne (July 1998)
Hungary	John Nichols (Due August 2003)
	Nigel Thorpe (April 1998)
Iceland	John Culver LVO (January 2001)
India	Michael Arthur (Due October 2003)
	Sir Rob Young (January 1999)
Indonesia	Richard Gozney CMG (August 2000)
Iran	Richard Dalton CMG (December 2002)
	Sir Nicholas Browne (May 1999)
Ireland	Stewart Eldon CMG QBE (April 2003)
	Sir Ivor Roberts (February 1999)
Israel	Simon McDonald (Due August 2003)
	Sherard Cowper-Coles CMG LVO (September 2001)
	Francis Cornish (September 1998)
Italy	Sir Ivor Roberts KCMG (May 2003)
	Sir John Shepherd (July 2000)
Jamaica	Peter Mathers (July 2002)
	Anthony Smith (March 1999)
Japan	Sir Stephen Gomersall KCMG (May 1999)
Jordan	Christopher Prentice (June 2002)
	Edward Chaplin (May 2000)
Kazakhstan	James Sharp (October 2002)
	Richard Lewington (February 1999)
Kenya	Edward Clay (December 2001)
	Jeffrey James (July 1997)
Korea (North)	David Slinn (November 2002)
Korea (South)	Warwick Morris (Due November 2003)
	Charles Humfrey (July 2000)
Kuwait	Christopher Wilton (August 2002)
	Richard Muir (December 1998)
Latvia	Andrew Tesoriere (March 2002)
	Stephen Nash (July 1999)
Lebanon	Richard Kinchen (December 2000)
Lesotho	Francis Martin (April 2002)
	Kaye Oliver (December 1998)
Libya	Anthony Layden (October 2002)
	Richard Dalton (November 1999)
Lithuania	Jeremy Hill (September 2001)
Luxembourg	Gordon Wetherell (September 2000)
	William Ehrman (September 1998)
Macedonia	George Edgar (September 2001)
Madagascar	Brian Donaldson (October 2002)
	Charles Mochan (July 1999)
Malawi	Norman Ling (September 2001)
	George Finlyason (May 1998)
Malaysia	Bruce Cleghorn (November 2001)
	Graham Fry (June 1998)
Mali	Alan Burner (August 2000)
	Graeme Loten (October 2001)
Malta	Vincent Fean (September 2002)
	Howard Pearce (June 1999)
Mauritius	David Snoxell (September 2000)
	James Daly (May 1997)
Mexico	Denise Holt CMG (June 2002)
	Adrian Thorpe (October 1998)
Moldova	Bernard Whiteside MBE (April 2002)
	Richard Ralph (August 1999)
Mongolia	Philip Rouse MBE (December 2001)
	Kay Coombs (July 1999)
Morocco	Haydon Warren-Gash (July 2002)
	Anthony Layden (March 1999)
Mozambique	Robert Dewar (August 2000)
Namibia	Alasdair MacDermott (April 2002)
	Brian Donaldson (January 1999)
Nepal	Keith Bloomfield (June 2002)
	Ronald Nash (March 1999)
Netherlands	Sir Colin Budd KCMG (April 2001)
New Zealand	Richard Fell (December 2001)
	Martin Williams OBE (April 1998)
Nicaragua	Timothy Brownbill (November 2002)
	Harry Wiles (September 2000)
	Roy Osborne (July 1997)
Nigeria	Philip Thomas (March 2001)
	Sir Graham Burton (May 1997)

Country	Appointed
Norway	Alison Leslie (September 2002)
	Sir Richard Dales (July 1998)
Oman	Stuart Laing (April 2002)
	Sir Ivan Callan (February 1999)
Pakistan	Mark Lyall Grant CMG (May 2003)
	Sir Hilary Synnott (October 2000)
	Sir David Dain (May 1997)
Panama	James Malcolm OBE (March 2002)
	Robert Davies (March 1999)
Papua New Guinea	David Gordon-Macleod (Due November 2003)
	Simon Scaddan (March 2000)
	Charles Drace-Francis (December 1997)
Paraguay	Anthony Cantor (November 2001)
	Andrew George (October 1998)
Peru	Richard Ralph CMG CVO (May 2003)
	Roger Hart (June 1999)
Philippines	Paul Dimond (April 2002)
	Alan Collins (December 1998)
Poland	Charles Crawford CMG (Due November 2003)
	The hon. Sir Michael Pakenham (January 2001)
	John Macgregor (September 1998)
Portugal	Dame Glynne Evans DBE CMG (September 2001)
	Sir John Holmes (June 1999)
Qatar	David MacLennan (June 2002)
	David Wright (June 1997)
Romania	Quinton Quayle (November 2002)
	Richard Ralph (August 1999)
Russia	Sir Roderic Lyne KBE CMG (January 2000)
Rwanda	Susan Hogwood MBE (July 2001)
	Graeme Loten (May 1998)
Saudi Arabia	Sherard Cowper-Coles CMG LVO (Due September 2003)
	Derek Plumbly (June 2000)
Senegal	Alan Burner (August 2000)
Serbia and Montenegro (formerly Yugoslavia)	David Gowan (Due September 2003)
	Charles Crawford CMG (January 2001)
	Brian Donnelly (November 1997)
Seychelles	Fraser Wilson (May 2002)
	John Yapp (November 1997)
Sierra Leone	Dr. John Mitchiner (Due August 2003)
	David Jones (May 2000)
	Peter Penfold (March 1997)
Singapore	Alan Collins CMG (December 2002)
	Sir Stephen Brown (March 2001)
	Alan Hunt (August 1997)
Slovakia	Roderic Todd (November 2001)
	David Lyscom (October 1998)
Slovenia	Hugh Mortimer LVO (January 2001)
Solomon Islands	Brian Baldwin (May 2001)
	Alan Waters (September 1998)
South Africa	Ann Grant (October 2001)
Spain	Stephen Wright CMG (May 2003)
	Peter Torry (September 1998)
Sri Lanka	Stephen Evans QBE (July 2002)
	Linda Duffield (January 1999)
Sudan	William Patey (Sepember 2002)
	Richard Makepeace (July 1999)
Swaziland	David Reader (September 2001)
	Neil Hook (October 1999)
Sweden	Anthony Cary (Due August 2003)
	John Grant CMG (April 1999)
Switzerland	Simon Featherstone (Due March 2004)
	Basil Eastwood (August 2001)
Syria	Peter Ford (Due September 2003)
	Henry Hogger (June 2000)
Tajikistan	Michael Smith (May 2002)
	Christopher Ingham (February 1999)
Tanzania	Richard Clarke (August 2001)
	Bruce Dinwiddy (April 1998)
Thailand	David Fall (July 2003)
	Barney Smith (March 2000)
Tonga	Paul Nessling (January 2002)
	Brian Connelly (August 1998)
Trinidad and Tobago	Richard Harborne (July 1999)
Tunisia	Robin Kealy CMG (January 2002)
	Ivor Rawlinson (February 1999)
Turkey	Peter Westmacott CMG LVO (January 2002)
Turkmenistan	Paul Brummell (February 2002)
	Fraser Wilson (July 1998)
Uganda	Adam Wood (October 2002)
	Tom Vaughan (May 2000)
Ukraine	Robert Brinkley (August 2002)
	Roland Smith (May 1999)
United Arab Emirates	Richard Makepeace (March 2003)
	Patrick Nixon (November 1998)
United States of America	Sir David Manning KCMG (Summer 2003)
	Sir Christopher Meyers (October 1997)
Uruguay	John Everard (September 2001)
	Andrew Murray (May 1998)
Uzbekistan	Craig Murray (September 2002)
	Christopher Ingham (February 1999)
Vanuatu	Michael Hill (November 2000)
Venezuela	Donald Lamont (Due August 2003)
	Dr. Edgar Hughes (July 2000)
Vietnam	Robert Gordon CMG OBE (Due September 2003)
	Warwick Morris (June 2000)
Yemen	Frances Guy (March 2001)
	Victor Henderson (October 1997)
Zambia	Timothy David (May 2002)
	Thomas Nesbitt (January 1998)
Zimbabwe	Sir Brian Donnelly KBE CMG (June 2001)
	Peter Longworth (April 1998)

And permanent Representative who have the personal rank of ambassador:

Country	Appointed
UK Mission to the UN (New York)	Sir Emyr Jones Parry KCMG (Due July 2003)
	Sir Jeremy Greenstock (August 1998)
UK Mission to the UN and other international organisations (Geneva)	Nicholas Thorne CMG (Due Autumn 2003)
	Simon Fuller CMG (January 2000)
	Roderic Lyne (May 1997)
UK Mission to the UN (Vienna)	Peter Jenkins (August 2001)
UK Permanent Representation to the Conference on Disarmament (Geneva)	David Broucher (October 2001)
	Ian Soutar (August 1997)
UK delegation to the OSCE (Vienna)	Colin Munro (Due November 2003)
	John de Fonblanque (June 1999)
UK delegation to NATO (Brussels)	Peter Ricketts CMG (Due July 2003)
	Sir Emyr Jones Parry (September 2001)
	Sir David Manning (December 2000)
UK delegation to the WEU (Brussels)	Peter Gooderham (Due August 2003)
	David Richmond (March 2000)
UK delegation to the OECD (Paris)	David Lyscom (Due January 2004)
	Christopher Crabbie (June 1999)
UK Permanent Representative to the EU (Brussels)	John Grant CMG (Due August 2003)
	Sir Nigel Sheinwald KCMG (August 2000)

Country	Appointed
UK delegation to the Council of Europe (Strasbourg)	Stephen Howarth (March 2003) Andrew Carter (August 1997)

Appointments

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the people appointed to ad hoc posts within his Department bearing the titles of advocate, tsar, adviser, champion and comparable titles since May 1997; what their job title is or was; what their role is or was; whether they were or are being paid; what the total cost of each such person was in each financial year, including expenses and benefits; what the expected cost of each such person is in 2003–04; to whom they are accountable; and if he will make a statement. [112464]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has two paid special advisers. All current paid special representatives are as listed. We are unable to provide historic records without incurring disproportionate costs. For the cost of the special advisers I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 28 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 133W. I am withholding further remuneration details under exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Name	Area	Comments	Dates
Sir Brian Fall	South Caucasus		Current
Lord Hannay	Cyprus	Recently retired and not being replaced	1996–2003
Alan Goulty	Sudan	Accountable to the Foreign Secretary and the International Development Secretary	Current
John Sawers	Iraq	About to be replaced by Jeremy Greenstock	Current
Michael Ryder	International drugs issues	Role about to come to an end	Current
Tom Phillips	Afghanistan	UK Special Representative	Current
Ian Whitting	Great Lakes		Current
Sir Jeffrey James	Nepal	Appointed by the Foreign Secretary and accountable to the Prime Minister	Current

Lord Levy is my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on the Middle East. He is unpaid; the FCO provides accommodation and, on occasions, logistic support.

Arctic Convoys (Medals)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 35W, whether the Russian Government have asked for the Defence of the Soviet Arctic Region Medal to be officially recognised since 19 November 2002. [126566]

Mr. Rammell: The Russian Government have not requested permission for the Defence of the Arctic Region medal (DSARM) to be officially recognised by the Government since 19 November 2002.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is aware that British veterans of the Second World War Arctic Convoys feel strongly about this issue and are keen to accept the Russian medal. We are sympathetic and keen to give a positive response should the Russian Government formally seek the Government's authority to award the DSARM to British citizens.

Arms Exports

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to ensure that military equipment manufactured in the UK is not used by oppressive regimes or politically unstable countries. [126232]

Mr. Rammell: The United Kingdom has one of the strictest and most transparent arms export licensing systems of any country. All export licence applications are rigorously assessed on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria, taking account of the circumstances prevailing at the time and other announced Government policies. Our criteria clearly set out our commitment to take account of the risk that exports might be diverted within the buyer country, re-exported under undesirable conditions, used for internal repression or external aggression, or to abuse human rights.

This Government continues to strengthen strategic export controls. The Export Control Act's secondary legislation is to be laid in October. It will introduce tough new controls on trafficking and brokering, the intangible transfer of military technology, and technical assistance. It is a significant step forward. It will ensure the UK cannot be used as a base for irresponsible trade in arms to undesirable destinations.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to ensure that military equipment manufactured in the UK is not being used in Aceh. [126229]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I visited Indonesia on 3–4 June 2003, and raised the issue of British-supplied military equipment with President Megawati and senior members of the Indonesian government. I reminded them of the assurances that British built military equipment should not be used offensively or to violate

human rights, and warned of the possible consequences for defence sales and defence relationships if there was a breach of the assurances.

Our Embassy in Jakarta regularly raises the assurances with the Indonesian Government, including senior military contacts. Our Embassy receives information from as wide a range of sources as possible, as well as from the Government, to monitor the use of British-built equipment. These include international agencies, NGOs, other observers and the media.

We have had no confirmed reports that British-built military equipment has been violating the assurances, but are monitoring the situation. We will follow up all credible allegations on the misuse of British-military equipment.

BAE Systems (Contracts)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the BAE Systems contracts the Foreign Office are helping with. [126457]

Mr. Rammell: Our posts overseas are providing support to a number of companies, including BAE Systems, in line with their normal duties. This includes assistance with sales and marketing campaigns. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is not, however, involved in any BAE Systems contracts at this time.

British Consulate (San Francisco)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the grades were of the civil servants, and what the total cost was of, the visits of two groups of civil servants to San Francisco to inspect the British Consulate, broken down by *(a)* travel, *(b)* subsistence and *(c)* other costs; how many other properties they inspected; and what length of time was taken for the two visits. [121456]

Mr. Rammell: The first visit took place in March 2002 and the second in March 2003.

The first comprised three D Band (Home Civil Service Principal equivalent) officers from different sections of our estate departments in Croydon. Two visited for five working days, and one for two, to inspect properties the Post had short-listed as potentially suitable as a new Residence. The cost of the three return flights was £11,986. Subsistence totalled £2,031. There would also have been some minor local expenditure on transport within San Francisco and photocopying.

The second visit also comprised three people: one from the Senior Management Structure (SMS) of the FCO, one D Band officer and one external adviser. The combined cost of air fares was £11,612. The SMS officer and the Estate Adviser spent five days in San Francisco but the D Band officer remained for a further six days (including the weekend) for a detailed technical investigation of the property selected. Subsistence totalled £4,026. Sundry expenditure including telephone calls totalled approximately £55. Local transport was arranged and paid for by the Consulate-General and the total cost is not readily available.

Burma

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ask *(a)* Standard Chartered Bank and *(b)* Cordiant Communications to withdraw from Burma. [125924]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The two biggest investors in Burma, BAT and Premier Oil, have been asked to withdraw their investment in Burma. I have made clear that our policy is not to encourage UK companies who trade or invest in Burma while the regime continues to suppress the basic human rights of its people. All British companies that inquire about the prospects either for trade with or investment in Burma are informed of this policy.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the value of imports of clothing from Burma was in the past two financial years. [125925]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: According to figures from HM Customs and Excise, the value of apparel and clothing accessories imported in to the UK from Burma in 2002 was approximately £50 million. In 2001 the value of such imports was approximately £52 million.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place a proposal for an EU-wide ban on new investment in Burma on the agenda at the EU Foreign Ministers meeting on 21 July. [125929]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have long been at the forefront of EU action to maintain and increase targeted pressure on the Burmese regime. We are currently pursuing with EU colleagues what additional economic and diplomatic action is required to ensure that national reconciliation, respect for human rights and democracy becomes a reality in Burma. Burma is not currently on the agenda for the EU Foreign Ministers meeting on 21 July. However, Burma will be a key focus during discussions at the ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting on 23–24 July.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [126663]

Mr. Straw: Between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2003, special advisers in my Department travelled abroad to the following places. The cost for each visit is included. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, and the Civil Service Management Code.

Date	
Michael Williams	
18 April 2002	Geneva Flight: RAF Accommodation: Nil Subsistence: £22.88 Total: £22.88

Date	
26–28 April 2002	Kosovo Flight: £1,227.40 Accommodation: £87.56 Subsistence: £63.92 Total: £1,378.88
14–16 May 2002	China Flight: £3,415.50 Train: £233 Accommodation: £183.24 Subsistence £391.35 Total: £4,223.09
27–29 May 2002	Berlin, Pakistan, India Flight: Charter Accommodation: £136.30 Subsistence: £36.88 Total: £173.18
13–21 July 2002	China, Japan, Hong Kong, India Flight: £2,464.40 Accommodation: £470.57 Subsistence: £228.51 Total: £3,163.48
10–16 September 2002	New York Flight: £2,448.30 Accommodation: £1,414.17 Subsistence: £335.91 Total: £4,198.38
7–10 October 2002	Paris, Cairo, Amman, Kuwait, Tehran Flight: Charter Accommodation: Official residences Subsistence: £59.81 Total: £59.81
5–6 November 2002	Belgrade, Pristina, Sarajevo Flight: RAF Accommodation: £95.41 Subsistence: £29.04 Total: £124.45
1–4 December 2002	Tokyo Flight: £2,943.10 Accommodation: £191.14 Subsistence: £55.08 Total: £3,189.32
5–6 December 2002	Copenhagen Flight: £637.10 Accommodation: £81.67 Subsistence: £103.67 Total: £822.44
7–11 January 2003	Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia Flight: £4,844.70 Accommodation: £82.95 Subsistence: £94.33 Total: £5,021.98
10–11 March 2003	Brussels Eurostar: £202.50 Accommodation: £111.11 Subsistence: £103.93 Total: £417.54
15 March 2003	Belgrade Flight: RAF Accommodation: Nil Subsistence: Nil Total: Nil
Ed Owen	
22–23 April 2002	Valencia Flight: RAF Accommodation: £98.55 Subsistence: £45.51 Total: £144.06
3 May 2002	Gibraltar Flight: RAF Accommodation: Nil Subsistence: Nil Total: Nil
7–8 May 2002	Washington Flight: £2,771.70 Accommodation: £147.42 Subsistence: £53.15 Total: £2,972.27
27 May 2002	Berlin Flight (Charter/Commercial): £348.60 Accommodation: Nil Subsistence: Nil Total: £348.60
29–30 August 2002	Helsingborg Flight (RAF/Commercial): £371.44 Accommodation: £97.49 Subsistence: £45 Total: £513.93
14–15 October 2002	Washington, Chicago Flight: £3,584 Accommodation: £135.72 Subsistence: £79.51 Total: £3,799.23
2–4 December 2002	Bonn, Berlin, Ankara, Slovenia Flight: RAF Accommodation: Ambassador's residence Subsistence: £15.38 Total: £15.38
22–23 January 2003	Washington Flight: £2,594.30 Accommodation: £110.24 Subsistence: £48.54 Total: £2,753.08

Cayman Islands

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department had with the Chief Justice regarding *(a)* the Attorney General of the Cayman Islands and *(b)* the Head of the Financial Reporting Unit in the Cayman Islands, prior to their resignations; and what actions have been taken since. [120274]

Mr. Rammell: The Governor of the Cayman Islands discussed a number of different issues with the Chief Justice and representatives of the Cayman Islands Government following the early ending of the Eurobank trial. The Financial Reporting Unit continues temporarily to operate under an Acting Head, and the Cayman Islands Solicitor General is Acting Attorney General pending the appointment of a successor.

China

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Chinese authorities concerning *(a)* the repatriation of North Korean refugees in China, *(b)* the refusal by the Chinese Government to allow the UNHCR access to the North Koreans who have fled into China and *(c)* China's obligations under the 1951 UN Convention on the Treatment of Refugees. [126395]

Mr. Rammell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) on 28 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 126W.

Correspondence

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will respond to the letter of 9 October 2002 from the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle regarding arms export controls. [126956]

Mr. Rammell: A substantive reply was sent to the hon. Member on 14 July 2003 by my Noble Friend Baroness Symons, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, together with an apology for the long delay in responding.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the UN Security Council report alleging exploitation of natural resources from Congo by other countries involved in the current conflict. [126701]

Mr. Mullin: The UN Expert Panel on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of Congo made a first report in October 2002. The panel's mandate was extended with our support earlier this year. The Panel will present their interim report to the Security Council on 24 July. We are still assessing the interim report, which was recently published on the UN website.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to ensure that British-based industrial users of coltan from the Democratic Republic of Congo are not purchasing smuggled coltan. [126702]

Mr. Rammell: We recognise that the exploitation of natural resources contributes to the underlying economic causes of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). As permanent members of the UN Security Council, the UK supported Resolution 1457 (2003) which reiterates the Security Council's commitment to take appropriate action to help put an end to the illegal exploitation of the resources of the DRC. We continue to uphold EU sanctions (an arms embargo and visa restrictions) and support related action in the UN. There are currently no restrictions on the import of coltan into the UK. However, in the case of undeclared imports of coltan into the UK, HM Customs have powers to seize the goods as with other illegal exports.

The UK is exploring how to improve governance of natural resource extraction, including through the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative backed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of *(a)* smuggling and *(b)* sale of coltan from Congo by armed forces from (i) Rwanda, (ii) Uganda and (iii) Burundi on the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [126704]

Mr. Rammell: The UN Expert Panel report on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), published in October 2002, provides extensive details of the widespread exploitation of the DRC's natural resources, including coltan. The report states that elite networks linked to the governments/militaries of the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda are the main players in the smuggling and/or sale of coltan; Burundi's role is small in comparison. Such exploitation continues today, with the active co-operation of the various rebel groups operating in the eastern part of DRC. The human rights of many citizens of the DRC have already been severely eroded by many years of violent civil war and the ensuing chaos. The trade in coltan has played a part in this conflict.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* press officers, *(c)* civil servants, *(d)* advisers to civil servants and *(e)* permanent staff were working for his Department in each year since 1996. [126484]

Mr. Rammell: The answer to the hon. Member's question can be found in answers to previous Parliamentary Questions and in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Departmental Reports, as follows:

(a) I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Mike O'Brien) gave to the hon. Member for Yeovil (David Laws) on 23 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 469W

(b) I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Ben Bradshaw) to the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Andrew Turner) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 63W. I also refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) on 2 July 2003 *Official Report*, column 310W.

(c) I refer the hon. Member to the 2003 Foreign and Commonwealth Office Departmental Report page 163.

(d) The FCO does not employ advisers to civil servants.

(e) See answer (c) above.

Any additional information for years prior to those shown in the 2003 Departmental Report can be found in previous Departmental Reports; copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Entry Clearance Officers

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many entry clearance officers there are in *(a)* Islamabad, *(b)* New Delhi, *(c)* Mumbai and *(d)* Dhaka, Bangladesh. [125518]

Mr. Rammell: Listed are the authorised establishment for entry clearance in:

(a) Islamabad: UK based—41.00, LE—64.60. Total 105.60[1]

(b) New Delhi: UK based—15.90, LE—46.00. Total 61.90

(c) Mumbai: UK based—14.00, LE—28.05. Total 42.05

(d) Dhaka: UK based—17.70, LE—44.00. Total 61.70

[1] Due to the earlier evacuation of staff from the High Commission in Islamabad the post is not yet fully staffed and three of the UK based positions are vacant. These vacant positions are included in the authorised establishment.

European Council of Ministers

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many informal meetings of the European Council of Ministers took place *(a)* between 1 July 2002 and 31 December 2002 and *(b)* between 1 January 2003 and 30 June 2003; when these meetings took place; what topics were discussed at these meetings; and if he will make a statement. [126106]

Mr. Rammell: Seven informal meetings of the Council of Ministers took place between 1 July 2002 and 31 December 2002, on the following dates and covering the following topics:

12–13 July on Employment and Social Policy;

19–21 July on Environment issues;

1 September on Foreign Affairs (Gymnich Informal Meeting of Ministers for Foreign Affairs);

6–8 September on Finance (informal ECOFIN Council);

8–10 September on Agriculture and Fisheries;

12–13 September on Justice and Home Affairs;

18–19 October on the Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Industry.

Thirteen informal Council meetings took place between 1 January 2003 and 30 June 2003, on the following dates and subjects:

24 January on Employment;

22 February on Energy;

14–15 February on Defence;

28–29 March on Justice and Home Affairs;

5 April on Education;

11–13 April on Finance (informal ECOFIN Council);

2–4 May on Foreign Affairs (Gymnich Informal Meeting of Ministers for Foreign Affairs);

5 May on Environment issues;

12–13 May on Agriculture and Fisheries;

16–17 May on Regional Policy;

24 May on Culture;

31 May-2 June on Merchant Marine;

6 June on Public Administration.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many informal meetings of the European Council of Ministers took place between 1st January 2002 and 30th June 2002; when these meetings took place; what issues were discussed at each of these meetings; which members of the Scottish Executive were present at each meeting; and if he will make a statement. [126116]

Mr. Rammell: Eleven informal meetings of the Council of Ministers took place during the Spanish Council presidency in 2002, on the following dates and covering the following topics:

25–26 January on Employment;

9–10 February on Foreign Affairs (Gymnich Informal Meeting of Ministers for Foreign Affairs);

14–15 February on Justice and Home Affairs;

22–23 February on Telecoms and the Information Society;

23–24 March on Defence;

13–14 April on Finance (ECOFIN);

27–30 April on Agriculture and Fisheries;

3–4 May on Tourism;

24–26 May on Environment issues;

31 May-1 June on Transport.

No members of the Scottish Executive were present at the informal meetings of the Council of Ministers. Devolved administration Ministers do not normally attend informal Council meetings, but do attend formal ones.

Gibraltar

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have to resume co-sovereignty negotiations on the future of Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement. [126827]

Mr. Rammell: Our aim remains to secure a better future for Gibraltar. We will continue our dialogue with Spain and Gibraltar to this end. No dates have been set for further meetings under the Brussels Process.

Government Wine Cellar

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many bottles of *(a)* wine and *(b)* other alcoholic beverages there were in the Government wine cellar, managed by his Department, in each of the last 10 years; and what his estimate is of the value. [122847]

Mr. Rammell: The Government wine cellar contains a mix of fine wines, beverage wines and spirits and liqueurs. Stock levels vary but generally the cellar contains approximately 37,000 bottles, of which fewer than 700 are spirits or liqueurs. There has been no significant variation in the stock levels since 1993. It is not possible to give a break down of the ratio of wines to spirits, etc over the last 10 years without incurring disproportionate costs.

Fine wines are bought young and then stored until ready for use, enabling aged wines of excellent value to be used by the Government for their hospitality needs. The value of the stock is subjective and bears no relation to the purchase costs. The current value of the stock is estimated to be in the region of £1.7 million.

Hong Kong

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government has made in respect of article 23 of the basic law of Hong Kong to the Government of the People's Republic of China. [123024]

Mr. Rammell: Article 23 of the Basic Law states that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) shall enact national security legislation "on its own". We have therefore made frequent representations to the SAR Government on this issue, including at Ministerial level.

We have also discussed the issue with the Chinese Government. I did so with Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui in January and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did so on 25 June with visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing. On 21 July, during his visit to China, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed Article 23 with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao.

On 16 July I issued my fourth statement about Article 23, in which I welcomed the significant amendments to the legislation made by the SAR Government on 5 July. In particular I welcomed the decision to remove from the legislation the proposed new provisions regarding the proscription of Hong Kong organisations subordinate to organisations proscribed on the Mainland on national security grounds. This had been one of the main concerns of the

people of Hong Kong and of the international community and we had repeatedly expressed our concern on this issue. I also welcomed the SAR Government's decision to delay passage of the legislation to allow more time for further discussion in Hong Kong.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent negotiations have taken place between his officials and Chinese representatives regarding the preservation of Hong Kong's special status; and if he will make a statement on the role of the UK in Hong Kong. [126396]

Mr. Rammell: Negotiations took place between the UK and China about Hong Kong's special status prior to the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty on 1 July 1997.

Since then, there have been regular exchanges at Ministerial and official levels. During those, the situation in post-handover Hong Kong has frequently been discussed. Both sides agree on the importance of maintaining the principles of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong which provides Hong Kong with a high degree of autonomy under the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary reports regularly to Parliament on the implementation of the Joint Declaration. The most recent such report was published on 16 July (Cm 5864). Our assessment continues to be that, generally, 'One Country, Two Systems' is working well in practice.

We have a strong, forward-looking bilateral relationship with Hong Kong, a key partner for the UK in the Asia-Pacific region. Given Britain's role as a joint signatory of the Joint Declaration, we maintain a close interest in developments in Hong Kong.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Hong Kong. [126469]

Mr. Rammell: On 16 July we published our latest report to Parliament, which reported on a number of important developments in Hong Kong in the first half of the year (Cm 5864). Our overall assessment is that, generally, the "One Country, Two Systems" principle continues to work well in practice.

On the same day, I issued my fourth press statement about the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government's moves to introduce national security legislation under Article 23 of the Basic Law. In this statement I welcomed the significant amendments to the legislation made by the SAR Government on 5 July. I particularly welcomed the decision to remove from the legislation the proposed new provisions regarding the proscription of Hong Kong organisations subordinate to organisations proscribed on the mainland on national security grounds. This had been one of the main concerns of the people of Hong Kong and of the international community and we had repeatedly expressed our concern on this issue. I also welcomed the SAR Government's decision to delay passage of the legislation to allow more time for further discussion in Hong Kong.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the Chinese Government's use of Article 23 legislation and the practice of Falun Gong in Hong Kong; what reports he has received on the extent of consultation by the Chinese Government with the people of Hong Kong on the use of Article 23; and what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the use of Article 23 in relation to the practice of Falun Gong and safeguards given to the people of Hong Kong when the territory was returned to China. [126508]

Mr. Rammell: Article 23 of the Basic Law (in effect Hong Kong's constitution) states:

> "The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government (CPG) or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organisations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region, and to prohibit political organisations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organisations or bodies."

The Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government introduced draft legislation, to meet its obligations under Article 23, into the Legislative Council in Hong Kong in February. The legislation has not yet been passed.

I have issued three press statements about the legislation since it was introduced into the Legislative Council, most recently on 16 July when I welcomed the significant changes to the legislation made by the SAR Government on 5 July. I particularly welcomed the decision to remove from the legislation the proposed new provisions regarding the proscription of Hong Kong organisations subordinate to organisations proscribed on the Mainland on national security grounds. This had been one of the main concerns of the people of Hong Kong and of the international community and we had repeatedly expressed our concern on this issue. I also welcomed the SAR Government's decision to delay passage of the legislation to allow more time for further discussion in Hong Kong.

We shall continue to follow this issue closely.

Iran

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with representatives of the Iranian Government about the construction of nuclear weapons. [126709]

Mr. MacShane: Our concerns about Iran's nuclear programme are raised with them at every opportunity, most recently by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary during his visit to Iran in July 2003.

We continue to urge Iran to meet in full its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the human rights situation in Iran. [126710]

Mr. Rammell: We continue to have serious concerns about the human rights situation in Iran. There has been recent progress on some issues, such as in the establishment of equal rights for women to divorce and

in the announcement by the Supreme Administrative Court of a suspension in stonings. However, systematic violation of human rights continues, including limits to freedom of expression.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with representatives of the Iranian opposition about human rights violations in that country. [126711]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and Ministerial colleagues conduct discussions about Iran with a wide range of interlocutors. Information on the human rights situation in Iran is drawn from a range of different independent sources.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what human rights reforms have been introduced in Iran since 5 February. [126712]

Mr. Rammell: Neither my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary nor I are aware of specific human rights reforms introduced in Iran since 5 February. There has been progress in some areas during the last 12 months, such as in the establishment of equal rights for women to divorce and the announcement by the Supreme Administrative Court of a suspension on stoning. But systematic human rights violation continues to be a key issue of concern in our relationship with Iran.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with French Government ministers about their arrest of Iranian resistance members. [126713]

Mr. Rammell: None. Officials have discussed the matter with the French Embassy in London. The French Government have explained publicly that the police were acting on evidence that the group was about to launch a campaign of violence. Several key members were detained, including the co-leader Mary am Rajavi. We understand that most of them, including Ms Rajavi, have since been released on bail.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of Iran's compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. [126714]

Mr. Mullin: We have for some time been concerned about Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions. We regularly urge Iran to comply fully with its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to sign and ratify the Additional Protocol to the IAEA Safeguards Agreement.

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what use was made of the advice of the Attorney General on the legal basis for post conflict reconstruction of Iraq in the negotiations on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1483. [120813]

Mr. Rammell: I am withholding the information under exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. It is not the practice of the Government to comment on advice given by the Attorney General.

Security Council Resolution 1483 acknowledges the continuing obligations of the occupying powers under applicable international law and clearly sets out the legal basis for the reconstruction of Iraq.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his discussions on the future government of Iraq; and whether former Ba'ath Party officials will be involved in them. [124030]

Mr. Rammell: During his visit to Iraq my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the evolving political process with Iraqis, US Ambassador Paul Bremer and UN Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello. There was broad consensus towards our approach, supported by UNSCR 1483, of helping Iraqis form a representative transitional administration leading to elections and democratic government.

On 16 May, the Coalition Provisional Authority issued an Order disestablishing the Ba'ath Party. This Order removes and bars all members of the Ba'ath Party at the rank of Senior Member and above from positions of authority in the future. All Ba'ath Party members suspected of criminal conduct will be investigated and, if necessary, detained.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the membership of the interim Baghdad City Council, broken down by *(a)* sex, *(b)* political affiliation, *(c)* religious affiliation, *(d)* ethnic background, *(e)* profession and *(f)* age; what arrangements are in place to change the membership; and if he will make a statement. [124938]

Mr. Rammell: Membership of the 37 strong Baghdad City Council is diverse and comprises a range of ethnic, religious and professional backgrounds. Six members are women, one of whom was elected as deputy chair. There is also a wide age range. Members are elected through a bottom up process. Neighbourhood advisory councils select district advisory councils that in turn selects the city council. It is for Iraqis to determine future council membership. A list of the members is as follows. A more detailed list will be placed in the Library of the House.

Dr. Khaled Basheer Mirza, 66 Council Chairperson. Karada district. Chaldean Christian. Serves on the Economy and Development Committee. Chairman of a university department.

Ms. Siham Hattab Hamdan, 31 Council Vice Chairperson. 31. Thawra, Medinat Sadr district. Shia Arab. Serves on Committees on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Public Relations, and Women and Children. Lecturer in English Literature.

Mr. Khaled Abdel Hussein Mohammed Khaily, 61 Rusafa, Hayy Idrissi, district. Faily Kurd. Member of the Health and Environment; Education, Youth and Sports; and Economy and Development committees. Retired Certified Public Accountant.

Mr. Adnan Abdul Sahib Hassan, 52 Rusafa. Hayy Sheikh Omar district. Shia Arab. Member of the General Services, Women and Children, and Public Relations committees. Former reserve major in the Iraqi Army and customs agent.

Mrs. Rasha Hani Hani, 29 Rusafa, Hayy Saadoun district. Sunni Arab. Member of the Economy and Development, Public Safety. Women and Children, and Education, Youth and Sports committees. Art teacher and actress.

Mr. Abdul Sattar Abdul Jabbar Al Ruba'ei, 46 Karkh, Hayy Sheikh Maroof district. Shia Arab. Serves on the Education, Youth and Sports, and Public Safety committees. Secondary School Teacher.

Ms. Shatha Hadi Mohammed Alobiadi, 34 Karkh, Hayy Al Salhiya district. Shia Arab. Member of the Women and Children, Economy and Development, and Public Relations committees. Previously worked in a bank

Mr. Kareem Mohammed Amin Mehdi Al Jaaf, 61 Karkh, Hayy Salhiya district. Faily Kurd. Member of the Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Economy and Development; and Women and Children committees. Manager of an apartment tower.

Mr. Sharhabel Shakir Rasheed, 44 Adhamiya, Hayy Adhamiya district. Sunni Arab. Serves on the Public Safety; Public Relations; and Economy and Development committees. Retired construction contractor.

Mr. Omar Mohammed Amin Al Rahmani, 43 Adhamiya, Hayy Al Maghrib district. Sunni Arab. Member of the Economy and Development, and Public Relations committees. Interpreter.

Dr. Riyadh Nassir Al Adhadh, 49 Adhamiya, Hayy Al Maghrib district. Sunni Arab. Chairman of the Administration Committee and also serves on the Health and Environment; and Education, Youth and Sports committees. Specialist in rheumatology and rehabilitation.

Mr. Amer Ahmed Baqr Ahmed Al Hashimi, 53 Adhamiya, Hayy Tunis district. Sunni Arab. Member of the General Services and Public Relations committees. Retired Major General in the Iraqi Army.

Sheikh Mohammed Baqer Al Suhail, 52 Kadhamiya, Hayy Kadhamiya district. Shia Arab. Chairman of the Economy and Development committee and also serves on the Public Relations committee.

Mr. Basim Salih Mahdy, 38 Kadhamiya, Hayy Hurriya district. Shia Arab. Currently, Mr. Member of the Economy and Development, Public Relations, and Public Safety committees. Self-employed as a business consultant.

Mr. Muhammed Sadik Hassan, 53 Kadhamiya, Hayy Utaffiya district. Shia Arab. Member of the Education, Youth and Sports, Women and Children and Public Relations committees. Retired secondary school physics teacher.

Mr. Saad Kheirabut Rashid, 28 Thawra, Medina! Al Sadr district. Shia Arab. Chairman of the Health and Environment committee and a member of the Public Relations, and Women and Children committees. He speaks English. Pharmacist.

Mr. Umran Hayder AIL 27 Thawra, Medinat Al Sadr district. Faily Kurd. Serves on the Education, Youth and Sports, and Public Relations committees. Works in a currency exchange.

Mr. Ahmed Hameed Yousif, 32 Thawra, Medinat Al Sadr district. Shia Arab. Member of the Health and Environment committee. Pharmacist.

Mr. Khudhair Abbas Nassir, 40 Thawra, Medinat Al Sadr district. Shia Arab. Member of the Administration, Education, Youth and Sports, and Economy and Development committees. Works in a CD/Video shop

Ms. Fatima Hassan Mohammed Al-Migdadi, 41 Thawra, Hayy Jamila district. Shia Arab. Member of the Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Public Relations, and Women and Children committees. English teacher

Mr. Hassen Hashim Al-Rubeii, 39 Thawra, Hayy Jamila district. Shia Arab. Serves on the Administration, Economy and Development, and General Services committees. Contractor with a construction company.

Sheikh Dari Khamis Al-Dari, 64 Mansour, Hayy Abu Ghuraib district. Sunni Arab. Serves on the Education. Youth and Sports committee.

Dr. Saieb Siddiq Abdel Aziz Al Gailani, 46 Mansour, Hayy Yarmouk district. Sunni Arab. Member of the Council's Health and Environment committees. General Director of a medical centre.

Eng. Ali Radhi Al Haidary, 46 Mansour, Hayy Adil district. Shia Arab. Member of the Administration, Education, Youth and Sports, and Public Relations committees. Director of a paint company.

Dr. Majida Yousif Sail, 37 Mansour, Hayy Ghazeliya district. Sunni Arab. Member of the Women and Children committee. Specialist in Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

Eng. Ali Rashid Al-Zubaidy, 40 9 Nisan, Hayy Mashtal district. Shia Arab. Member of the Council's Public Relations Committee. Owner of automotive and heavy equipment spare parts shop.

Dr. Hussein Abdel Kadhem Tahir Salman, 30 9 Nisan, Hayy Al-Amin. Shia Arab. Member of the Health and Environment, Public Relations, and Economy and Development committees. General Practitioner.

Mr. Ali Mussad Kraidi, 42 9 Nisan, Hayy Al Obaidy district. Shia Arab, Chairman of the Public Relations committee and a member of the Economy and Development committee. Owner of an electrical equipment shop.

Eng. Abdulghani Khudair Al-Hussainy, 42 9 Nisan, Hayy Baghdad Al Jedida district. Shia Arab. Chairman of the Public Services Committee (dealing with roads, buildings, sewers, electricity, etc.) and a member of Economy and Development committee. Unemployed.

Mr. Yacoub Muhi Albu Khati, 36 Rashid district. Shia Arab. Serves on the City Council's Public Relations, and Public Safety committees. Retired Army non-commissioned officer.

Mr. Majed Abd Al Amer Abed Al Mosawi., 40 Rashid, Hayy Al Hadar district. Shia Arab. Member of the City Council's General Services and Women and Children committees. Owns a curtain factory.

Mr. Mohammed Zamil Saeed Al-Sa'adi, 32 Rashid, Hayy Al Saydiyah district. Shia Arab. Serves on the Legal and Human Rights, Economy and Development, and Women and Children committees. Attorney

Dr. Nassreen Hayder Kader, 35 Rashid, Hayy Al Hadar district. Sunni Kurd. Serves on the Economy and Development, Public Relations, Women and Children, and Health and Environment committees. Chief of Laboratories at a health clinic

Dr. Ali Hussain Faraj Daoud, 38 Rashid, Hayy Al-Furat district. Shia Arab. Former University Professor.

Mr. Louay Hatem Sultan Al Erris, 51 Karada, Hayy Al-Jami'a district. Shia Arab. Serves on the General Services, Education, and Youth and Sports committees; Deputy chairman of the Administration committee. Aircraft engineer.

Mr. Nashat Al-Husseini, 42 Karada, Hayy Zafraniya district. Shia Arab. Member of the Administration, General Services, Public Safety, Public Relations, and Economy and Development. Merchant.

Sheikh Ayad Jafar Al-Ekabi Karada, Hayy Zafraniya district. Shia Arab. Chairman of the Education, Youth and Sports committee and has also volunteered to serve on the Council's Economy and Development committee. Imam of a mosque.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will name the members of the Iraq Survey Group and list the *(a)* nationality, *(b)* experience, *(c)* salary and *(d)* parent organisation of each; and if he will make statement. [125005]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave on 23 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 616W to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith) and to

the answer I gave on 1 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 197–98W to the my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson).

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his oral answer of 8 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 888, (1) whether his Department had an input into the Joint Intelligence Committee's assessment of the 45 minute claim; and if he will make a statement; [125789]

(2) whether his Department had an input into the claims that Iraq was seeking uranium from Niger; and if he will make a statement; [125790]

(3) whether intelligence aspects in the Government's dossier on Iraq were not from a source *(a)* emanating from and *(b)* verified by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [125791]

Mr. Rammell: The issue of how intelligence information was handled, analysed and utilised in the preparation of the Government's dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction published in September 2002 is currently being addressed by the Intelligence and Security Committee of the House. Their report will be presented to the House in due course.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 579W, on Iraq, what measures the Government have taken to encourage all states to share information that they have with the IAEA. [125795]

Mr. Rammell: The UK played a key role in the drafting of UN Security Council Resolution 1441, which called on all states that had information relevant to the activities of the UN weapons inspectors to make that information available to them. In subsequent Security Council debates on the progress of inspections, we reiterated our support for UNSCR1441.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he was first informed of the attempts by Iraq to procure uranium from an African source; when this source was identified as being Niger; what documents he has examined that provide evidence of this procurement effort by Iraq; what efforts have been made to validate the information; and when the information and supporting documentation was made available to *(a)* the International Atomic Energy Agency and *(b)* UNMOVIC. [126059]

Mr. Rammell: The issue of the handling, analysis and utilisation of intelligence material in the preparation of the Government dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction published in September 2002 is currently being addressed by the Security and Intelligence Committee of the House. Their report will be presented to the House in due course.

The UK did not provide any documentation on Iraqi attempts to procure uranium from Africa to either the IAEA or to UNMOVIC.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is towards the inclusion of representatives of Iraqi political parties in meetings with the occupying authorities in Iraq, with particular reference to the Iraqi Communist Party; when he or his representatives last met representatives of the Iraqi Communist Party; and what plans he has to meet such representatives in the future. [126086]

Mr. Rammell: In the run up to the formation of the Iraqi Governing Council on 13 July we sought to encourage the inclusion of a representative cross-section of Iraqi society through regular consultation with a variety of Iraqi leaders and groups.

John Sawers, UK Special Representative to Iraq, and Ambassador Bremer met the leader of the Iraqi Communist Party in the week before the launch of the Governing Council. John Sawers had previously met him, as had members of the US governance team. Many other Iraqi political leaders had recommended the inclusion of the Communist Party in the Council. Mr. Hamid Majid Mousa is the Iraqi Communist Party's representative on the Council.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the United Kingdom representatives in Iraq have taken to ensure leaders of the former Ba'ath Party in Iraq are not given senior administrative or political positions. [126307]

Mr. Rammell: On 16 May, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) issued an Order disestablishing the Ba'ath Party. This Order removes and bars all members of the Ba'ath Party at the rank of Senior Member and above from positions of authority in the future. All Ba'ath Party members suspected of criminal conduct will be investigated and, if necessary, detained. The fifth CPA Order established the de-Ba'athification Council, an Iraqi body reporting to the CPA to vet former members of the Ba'ath Party for future Government employment.

The Coalition has, therefore, been very careful when re-staffing the Ministries, in consultation with the Governing Council, not to include senior Ba'thists: the CPA has a vigorous vetting procedure for senior positions.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will list the members of the Iraqi Governing Council, indicating *(a)* their ethnicity, *(b)* their faith and *(c)* organisations or political parties which they represent; and if he will identify which members of the council are women. [126636]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 17 July 2003]:* The following information on the background of the members of the Governing Council was made public by the Coalition Provisional Authority on 13 July. I am withholding further details on each individual under exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information:

Iraqi Governing Council Text Issued by Coalition Provisional Authority on 13 July

Dr. Ebrahim Jafari Al Eshaiker

Main Spokesman of the Islamic Da'wah Party. Born in Karbala', educated in Mosul University as a medical doctor.

Dr. Ahmad Chalabi

Head of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), a Professor of Mathematics and a businessman. Founder of the INC.

Ahmad Shya'a al-Barak

General Coordinator for the Human Rights Association of Babel. General Coordinator for the Bar Association in Babel. Graduate of the Law Faculty, Babel University. Graduate of the College Management and Economy, Baghdad University. One of the tribal leaders of Al Bu Sultan tribe in Babel.

Dr. Ayad Allawi

Secretary General of the Iraqi National Accord. PhD in medicine. Started to oppose the dictatorial regime in the early 1970s and was in the forefront of efforts to organise opposition both within Iraq and abroad.

Dr. Jalal Talabani

Jalal Talabani is Secretary General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and a leading figure of the Iraqi democratic movement during the last 50 years.

Hamid Majeed Mousa

Secretary of the Iraqi Communist Party since 1993. Born in Babil province. An economist and petroleum researcher. Left Iraq in 1978 and returned in 1983 to continue his political activities against the dictatorial regime.

Judge Dara Nor al Din

A Judge who as a member of the Court of Appeal, held one of Saddam's edicts (confiscating land without proper compensation) unconstitutional. Was sentenced to two years in jail. Served eight months at Abu Ghraib before being released in the general amnesty last October.

Dr. Raja Habib Khuzai

Head of maternity hospital in Diwaniya. Studied and lived in the UK from the late 1960s until 1977 when 'she' returned to Iraq.

Samir Shakir Mahmood Sumaidy

From the Al-Sumaidy clan with documented lineage from the Prophet Mohammed through Mousa Al-Khadhum. Ancestral lands located near Haditha in the Al-Anbar region. Writer, designer and entrepreneur. A prominent figure in the opposition to the Saddam regime.

Salahaddin Muhammad Bahaddin

Elected as Secretary General of the Kurdistan Islamic Union in the first conference of the party in 1994, was re-elected in the second and third conferences and still holds the post. Born in Halabja. Has written several books in Kurdish and Arabic.

Songul Chapouk

From Kirkuk and from the Iraqi Turkoman Community. A trained Engineer and teacher. 'She' heads the Iraqi Women's Organisation (based in Kirkuk) which aims to bring together all the female communities of Iraq.

Abdul Zahra Othman Mohammed

Head of the Islamic Da'wah Movement (Harakat al Dawa al Islamiya) in Basra. Writer, thinker and political activist. Editor of numerous newspapers and magazines.

Abdul Aziz al-Hakim

Abdul Aziz al-Hakim is a religious and political leader and the current leader of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq. He is the brother of Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim. They both returned to Iraq after 20 years of exile and are both the sons of the late Ayatollah Sayyid Mohsin al-Hakim.

Abdul Karim Al Muhammadawi

Head of Iraqi Party of God in Al Amara. Member and Rotating Chairman of Interim Supervisory Council in Maysan Province. Dubbed "Prince of the Marshes" for leading the resistance movement against Saddam in the Southern Marshes for 17 years, for which he spent six years in prison.

Dr. Adnan Pachachi

President of the Iraqi Independent Democrats. Former Foreign Minister and Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

Dr. Akila Al Hashimi

Diplomat. 'She' led Iraqi delegation to New York donors' conference. PhD in Modern Literature and Bachelors in Law. Working with UN programmes in Iraq since 1991 in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ghazi Ajil Al-Yawar

Born in Mosul. A civil engineer. Recently Vice President of Hicap Technology Co. Lyd., Riyadh. Married with 4 children.

Dr. Mohsen Abdul Hameed

Secretary General of the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP). Born in the city of Kirkuk, Author of more the 30 books in the field of interpretation of the Holy Quran. Detained in 1996 on the charge of reorganising the IIP. Professor in the College of Education in Baghdad University.

Dr. Seyyid Muhammed Bahr ul-Uloom

Highly-respected Shi'a clergyman. Returned from London where he headed the Ahl al-Bayt charitable centre. Elected as the Shi'a member of a leadership triumverate by the Iraqi opposition after the Gulf Conflict.

Mahmoud Othman

Independent politician and long-term leader of the Kurdish National Struggle.

Masood Barzani

President of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). He rose to this position from peshmerga. He was elected President in 1979 and re-elected in 1999.

Mowaffak al-Rubaie

Born in al-Shatra. Member of British Royal Doctors' College. Consultant in internal medicine and neurology. Author of the Declaration of the Shia of Iraq. Activist in human rights. Student of the martyr Imam Baaker al-Sadr.

Naseir al-Chadirchi

Leader of the National Democratic Party. Resident of Baghdad. Lawyers, businessman and farm owner.

Judge Wael Abdulatif

Born in Basra and practiced civil and criminal law before being disbarred and imprisoned by Saddam. Had been head judge at Nasiriya and now deputy head judge in Basra. Elected Governor of Basra on 4 July 2003 by the interim local council with the support of all the leading political and religious parties.

Yonadam Kanna

Secretary General of the Assyrian Democratic Movement. Active member of the Assyrian-Chaldean community. Former Minister of Public Works and Housing and Former Minister of Industry and Energy in Iraqi Kurdistan. Engineer since 1975. Activist against the dictatorial regime since 1979.

The Governing Council includes 13 Shia; 11 Sunni; and one Christian. There are Shia, Sunni, Kurdish, Turkoman and Christian representatives. Three (12 per cent.) are women.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the outbreak of radiation sickness at the Al Tuwaitha nuclear facility in Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [126854]

Mr. Rammell: We are aware of reports of people in the area of the Al Tuwaitha nuclear facility having looted drums and containers, emptied low-enriched uranium from them, and taken the containers off to use for water storage. The site has now been secured, and the radio-active material there sealed in concrete. There is minimal likelihood of further looting. Initial indications are that there is little or no immediate radiation sickness evident in the population, but there may be longer term health risks to people who have been exposed to radiation. A task force has been set up in Baghdad to take forward action on recovering radio-active material that has been taken from the site, and monitoring the long-term health of people at risk of exposure to radiation. The task force includes representatives from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), Iraqi Ministry of Health and Iraqi Atomic Energy Commission, as well as the World Health Organisation.

The action taken by Greenpeace to replace the contaminated barrels with clean ones is welcome.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his statement of 15 July 2003, on Iraq, what the source was of his statement that Saddam Hussein expelled UNSCOM inspectors at the end of 1998. [126905]

Mr. MacShane: Throughout 1998 Iraq maintained an increasingly obstructive attitude towards UNSCOM. Faced with mounting obstruction and harassment which made it impossible for them to carry out their mandate, UNSCOM had no alternative but to withdraw. They were thus effectively forced out of Iraq by Saddam Hussein's regime.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made since the end of the conflict in Iraq in the search for weapons of mass destruction; and what quantities of weapons of mass destruction have been found. [126084]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* Coalition forces and specialist personnel of the Iraq Survey Group are actively pursuing sites, documentation and individuals connected with Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programmes. We are investing significant effort in the search. The process will be painstaking.

There have been some successes: the discovery of mobile laboratories which bear a striking resemblance to those described in US Secretary of State Colin Powell's presentation to the UN Security Council in March 2003; and the recent recovery of a large quantity of documents relating to Iraq's nuclear programme together with parts of a gas centrifuge which had been hidden since 1991 by an Iraqi scientist formerly engaged on Iraq's nuclear programme. We anticipate that more scientists previously employed on Iraq's WMD programmes will start to come forward with evidence and equipment.

Any finds clearly must be very carefully analysed and assessed. This process is continuing. When we have collated the evidence, it will be presented appropriately and properly.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has forwarded to the International Atomic Energy Agency the intelligence from an unnamed third country, regarding Iraq's supposed attempt to buy uranium from Niger. [126313]

Mr. Rammell: No. Under long-established agreements such intelligence may only be shared with others with the express permission of the originating agency. We have encouraged all states that have relevant information to pass it to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action was taken in response to information that Iraq had been trying to obtain uranium from an African source; when he was first informed that Mr. Joseph Wilson had been sent to Niger to investigate whether Iraq was seeking uranium yellowcake from Niger; when he asked for the Wilson Report from the US Central Intelligence Agency; what discussions on the allegations he has had with officials of the United States Government since February 2002; and if he will make a statement on the source of United Kingdom intelligence on Iraqi interests in uranium from Niger. [126443]

Mr. Rammell: The Government was not aware of Ambassador Wilson's visit to Niger until recent media reports. The Government of the United States did not brief us on the visit at the time, but has now given us a comprehensive account of his report. I cannot comment further as it is the longstanding practice of successive Governments not to comment on intelligence matters.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 3 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 456W, on Iraq, if he will make a statement on the UK Government's obligations under Article 10 of Security Council Resolution 1441 to pass to the International Atomic Energy Agency the information upon which it bases its assessment that Saddam Hussein's regime attempted to obtain uranium from Africa. [126582]

Mr. Rammell: The UK has encouraged all states that have relevant information to pass it to the UN weapons inspection teams. The information upon which the assessment was made that Saddam Hussein's regime had attempted to procure uranium from Africa came from the intelligence service of another Government. Under the terms of long-established agreements covering the sharing of intelligence information, no Government can pass on such information to anyone else without the express consent of its originator.

Israel

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what matters in respect of

(a) Israel's possession of nuclear weapons, *(b)* Israel's policy on signing the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty and *(c)* the imprisonment of Mordecai Vanunu he raised with (i) Prime Minister Sharon and (ii) members of his delegation during his visit to London in July. [126308]

Mr. Rammell: The priority for the visit was to discuss Road Map implementation and bilateral relations.

We do however consistently urge Israel to accede to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non nuclear weapons state, and to sign a full-scope safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), most recently during official-level talks in Tel Aviv on 5 March. Under the agreement with IAEA, Israel's nuclear facilities would be subject to regular inspection to detect and eliminate any diversion of nuclear materials for weapons production. The UK has consistently supported UN Resolutions calling for the establishment of a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction. That zone would include Israel.

We have raised our humanitarian concerns about the conditions of Mr Vanunu's imprisonment with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Following his latest parole hearing the Israeli authorities decided against his early release. Our Embassy in Tel Aviv will continue to monitor his case.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by his Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if he will make a statement. [126199]

Mr. Rammell: Since 1997 two outsourced IT contracts have been signed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In March 1997 a 10-year PFI contract, valued at £2 million, was signed with BT Syntegra for an electronic archive system, known as Minerva. In May 2000 a 10-year PFI contract was signed with Global Crossing Telecommunications (UK) for the FCO Telecommunications Network (FTN). This contract is now valued at £237.6 million including bandwidth purchased for other Government Departments. Both PFI contracts are still in place and neither has been renegotiated.

Judicial Committee of the Privy Council

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had with the governing authorities of *(a)* Anguilla, *(b)* Bermuda, *(c)* the British Virgin Islands, *(d)* the Cayman Islands, *(e)* the Falkland Islands, *(f)* Gibraltar, *(g)* Montserrat, *(h)* St Helena, *(i)* the Turks and Caicos Islands, *(j)* the Isle of Man, *(k)* Jersey and *(l)* Guernsey on the Government's plans to change the legal responsibilities of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council as a court of appeal. [126773]

Mr. Rammell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs on 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 471W.

Media Training

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost was to his Department of media and voice training for ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123132]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has spent a total of £405,664 on media and voice training from April 1997 to end March 2003. The training was for officials only.

The table as follows shows expenditure per annum.

£

Year	*Amount*
1997–98	59,732
1998–99	59,732
1999–2000	15,705
2000–01	96,941
2001–02	101,523
2002–03	109,193
Total	405,664

Guantanamo Bay

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on trials of *(a)* British citizens and *(b)* foreign nationals with an indefinite right of abode in the UK who are detained in Guantanamo Bay being held under the jurisdiction of (i) courts in the USA, (ii) courts in the UK and (iii) courts with an international jurisdiction. [126463]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 17 July 2003]:* The Government's view is that if any of the detainees held at Guantanamo Bay are to be tried, the trial must be fair and accord with international law, wherever it may be conducted.

The Government are not in a position to provide diplomatic assistance to non-British nationals wherever they may be detained abroad.

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which other Government Departments he consulted about the establishment of military tribunals in Guantanamo Bay; and when. [126865]

Mr. MacShane: The Military Commissions concerned were established by the US President's Military Order of 13 November 2001, Detention, Treatment and Trial of Certain Non-US Citizens in the War Against Terrorism.

The Government was not consulted on the Order.

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received from consular authorities about the plans of the US authorities to charge UK prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay; and what the maximum penalties will be that such prisoners face. [123440]

Mr. Mullin: We are in regular contact with the United States authorities about the British detainees held at Guantanamo Bay, although our discussions are not with the consular authorities. Two of the British detainees have been designated as eligible for trial by

Military Commissions, but have not yet been charged. The US announced on 18 July that they would not commence any Military Commission proceedings against British nationals pending discussions between US and UK legal experts. During his visit to the US on 21–22 July, the Attorney-General received assurances from the US Administration that the prosecution would not seek the death penalty in either of these two cases.

We have been informed that the United States authorities have not yet made a decision to charge or release any of the other British nationals detained at Guantanamo Bay. We are pressing the United States authorities to move forward with the process of determining the detainees' future and shall continue to do so.

Feroz Abbasi

Geraint Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will request from the US Administration a statement of the evidence against Mr. Feroz Abbasi. [125496]

Mr. Mullin: It is not our practice to comment on evidence against any individual, which may or may not be used in criminal proceedings (Exemption 4a of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information applies). Any evidence received would be passed to the prosecuting authorities as appropriate.

Geraint Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government has asked for the extradition of Mr. Feroz Abbasi. [125497]

Mr. Mullin: It is not the practice of the Government to comment on whether an extradition request may be made in any individual case. Exemption 4a of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information applies.

Peter Bleach

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in seeking the release of Mr. Peter Bleach from prison in India; and if he will make a statement. [126233]

Mr. Mullin: The Indian Deputy-Prime Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, visited the UK in June. He called on my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary during his visit. Mr. Bleach's case was raised at both meetings.

Mr. Advani undertook to take a fresh look at Mr. Bleach's case when he returned to India. Our High Commissioner in New Delhi called on the Indian Home Secretary on 4 July 2003. The Indian Home Secretary told the High Commissioner that his Ministry were preparing and submitting papers on Mr. Bleach's case to Deputy-Prime Minister Advani's office. We continue to monitor developments and are in close contact with Mr. Bleach.

Nicaragua

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Nicaragua. [126866]

Mr. Rammell: Since his election victory in 2001, President Bolanos' administration has been dominated by his attempts to wrest the power to govern from his allegedly corrupt predecessor, Arnoldo Aleman. In December 2002, the National Assembly voted to strip Aleman of his parliamentary immunity; he is currently under house arrest and could now face criminal prosecution. We have assured Nicaragua of our commitment to good governance, transparency, economic reform and exposing corruption and recognise the President's evident equal commitment to these objectives.

North Korea

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further discussion between the UK and other countries regarding the possible interdiction of ships and planes from North Korea is planned to take place in Canberra in July; and what proposals the UK intends to bring to this meeting. [123678]

Mr. Rammell: The discussions, which were held in Brisbane on 9 and 10 July, concentrated on how best to take forward the Proliferation and Security Initiative and, in particular, on defining actions necessary for effective interdiction at sea and the modalities for sharing relevant information. The UK did not table any specific proposals.

A Chairman's Statement was issued following the meeting. This can be found on the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade internet website at www.dfat.gov.au/globalissues.

The group plans to meet again in France at the beginning of September.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received regarding North Korean nuclear weapons programmes; and if he will make a statement on Government policy on nuclear weapons programmes in North Korea. [126579]

Mr. MacShane: We have been in close contact with allies about North Korea's nuclear programme. The UK will continue to work closely with our allies and partners to find a satisfactory solution to this issue.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the US Administration concerning North Korea's nuclear weapons programme. [126943]

Mr. MacShane: We remain seriously concerned about recent statements and actions by North Korea. We are maintaining close contact with the United States as well as with other allies and partners to work towards a satisfactory resolution of the issue.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received, and what latest assessment he has made of, North Korea's nuclear weapons programme; and if he will make a statement. [126944]

Mr. MacShane: We are maintaining close contact with allies and partners with a view to finding a satisfactory resolution to the North Korean nuclear issue. We remain seriously concerned about recent statements and actions by the North Korean Government.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel rods in North Korea. [126945]

Mr. MacShane: We and our allies are seriously concerned about the reports of North Korean reprocessing activities. We are maintaining close contact with our allies and partners to seek a satisfactory resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* China and *(b)* South Korea concerning nuclear weapons programmes in North Korea. [126946]

Mr. Rammell: We remain in close contact with the governments of China, South Korea and other countries on North Korea's nuclear weapons programmes. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister visited Tokyo, Seoul and Beijing from 18 to 22 July, and held detailed talks on North Korea with his counterparts. North Korea must comply with its international obligations, and dismantle its nuclear weapons programmes in a visible, verifiable and irreversible way.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received on the potential proliferation of nuclear weapons to terrorist organisations from North Korea. [126947]

Mr. MacShane: We and our allies remain seriously concerned about the possible proliferation of nuclear weapons from a number of countries, including North Korea. A new multi-national initiative, the Proliferation and Security Initiative, has recently been launched to look at means by which we can counter this threat.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the North Korean Government concerning nuclear weapons programmes in North Korea. [126948]

Mr. MacShane: The principal recent discussions on this issue have been between North Korea, the United States and China. The UK has not been directly involved in any discussion of the issue in recent months.

Pacific Islands

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of his Department's Ministers have visited Pacific islands since October 2000; and which islands these were. [R] [126513]

Mr. Rammell: My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), the then Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, visited Kiribati in October 2000 for the Pacific Islands Forum. My hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin), the then Foreign and Commonwealth Office Whip attended the Pacific Islands Forum in Fiji on behalf of my hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. MacShane) in August 2002. I expect to visit the region for the Pacific Island Forum meeting in Auckland in August. Details of my itinerary will be announced in due course.

Pakistan

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on bilateral relations between the UK and Pakistan. [126172]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: UK-Pakistan relations are warm and close. Our multifaceted relationship is bound together by our historic links and underpinned by the three-quarter of a million British citizens of Pakistani origin. We engage at all levels and President Musharraf's successful official visit to the UK in June 2003 has helped to further strengthen the bilateral relationship.

Saudi Arabia

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens are imprisoned in Saudi Arabia; which individual has been imprisoned the longest; how long he has been in prison; and of what charge he has been convicted. [125415]

Mr. Mullin: Currently there are eight British citizens in prison in Saudi Arabia. Of these, the longest serving is Mohammed Chaudhry, who has been detained since June 1999 on charges of negligence.

St. Helena

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken in response to the petition on securing democratic government in St Helena presented to the acting Governor of St Helena on 19 April. [126860]

Mr. Rammell: The petition, which was received in the FCO on 19 May, called for better governance on St. Helena and a more positive attitude towards inward investment. The petition was carefully considered by FCO Ministers, following which an FCO official wrote to a representative of the petitioners re-affirming the government's desire to work in partnership with the people of St Helena to help ensure a secure and successful future for the island, as outlined in the 1999 Overseas Territories White Paper. The letter made clear that an important aspect of this would be consideration of proposals for air access to the island.

We recognise the importance of St Helena's continuing economic and political development. An FCO team visited St Helena in April/May to take forward discussions on the constitutional review. We will continue to engage with elected members in St. Helena with the aim of reaching agreement on the key principles necessary for the drafting of a new constitution.

Uganda

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of *(a)* the state of civil society, *(b)* the extent of freedom of and participation in political expression and *(c)* the separation of state institutions and political party systems in Uganda; and if he will make a statement [126107]

Mr. Mullin: Civil society, though still fragile, continues to grow in stature and importance. Although multi-party politics is not yet established, President Museveni has indicated his intention to move in this direction. Freedom of expression across the political spectrum is tolerated and Uganda enjoys a free press. The Constitutional Review Commission, set up by the Ugandan Government, is now considering issues such as separation of state institutions and political party systems in preparation for Uganda's move to multi-party democracy.

Visas

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the staffing of UK Visas is; and what it was in July 2001. [125994]

Mr. Rammell: The current Authorised Establishment for UK Visas Division in London is 82.80. The equivalent figure for March 2001 was 56 (the figure for July is not available).

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Department since 29 October 2002. [126617]

Mr. Straw: Seventy-three.

Yemen

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Foreign Minister of Yemen; and if he will make a statement. [125520]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary last met the Foreign Minister of Yemen in March 2002.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Zimbabwean nationals normally covered by the travel sanctions imposed by the EU have been granted dispensations to travel to the European Union since the imposing of sanctions; and on what grounds such dispensations were given. [121323]

Mr. Mullin: To the best of our knowledge, 13 Zimbabweans on the EU travel ban list have travelled to the EU since the targeted sanctions were imposed on 18 February 2002:

Robert and Grace Mugabe, Stan Mudenge, Joseph Made, Elliot Manyika and George Charamba: Rome, to attend World Food Summit meetings: 10 to 13 June 2002.

Augustine Chihuri, Police Commissioner: France, to attend meetings of the Interpol Executive Committee: 14–16 May, 18–20 June and 27 August 2002.

Samuel Mumbengegwi, Trade and Industry Minister: Belgium, to attend EU-ACP trade talks: 22–29 September, 9–11 December 2002 and 12–16 May 2003 and to attend an ACP trade ministers meeting 31 July-1 August 2003.

Christopher Kuruneri, Deputy Finance and Economic Development Minister and Paul Mangwana, Minister for Enterprises and Parastatals: Belgium, an EU-ACP conference: 25–28 November.

Francis Nhema, Environment and Tourism Minister: France, UNESCO meeting: on 9–10 January 2003.

Kembo Mohadi, Minister for Home Affairs: Vienna, UN Commission on narcotic drugs: 15–18 April 2003.

Ms Sithembiso Nyoni, Minister of Small and Medium Enterprise Development: Vienna, UNIDO youth employment summit: 6–9 April 2003.

Paul Mangwana; Belgium. EU-ACP meeting: 7–10 July 2003.

In all cases, the EU country concerned consulted EU partners before issuing visas. The EU's Common Position of February 2002, imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe, specifically allowed member states to grant exemptions where "travel is justified on the grounds of humanitarian need, including religious obligation, or on grounds of attending meetings of international bodies or conducting political dialogue that promotes democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Zimbabwe". This clause was made more explicit when the Common Position was rolled over in 2003, to state that a member state shall grant a visa when it is "bound by an obligation of international law". In all these cases, the EU country in question had a legal obligation to grant visas.

In the case of the attendance of Robert and Grace Mugabe and Stan Mudenge at the France-Africa summit in Paris in February 2003, France argued for an exemption to be granted under article 3.3 of the Common Position, where travel is justified on the grounds of conducting political dialogue that promotes democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We did not want Robert Mugabe at the France-Africa summit in Paris. We made this clear to the French Government, at various levels as well as to other EU partners. The meeting took place two days after the EU sanctions on Zimbabwe were due to expire. Our priority then was to ensure a roll-over of those sanctions. The roll-over required a consensus among EU member states. This was achieved on 18 February 2003.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost was of the British delegation's participation in the agriculture meetings in Paxos. [125643]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 14 July 2003]*: No British delegation has attended agriculture meetings in Paxos within the last six months.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 19 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 358W, on agricultural shows, which *(a)* agricultural shows and *(b)* other rural events she has attended this year in her official capacity; and how many she plans to attend in the rest of the year. [124952]

Alun Michael: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State visited a LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) demonstration event at Leverhulme Farms in Cheshire on 3 March. On 24 March she opened a project public services to the rural community at the village of Waters Upton in Shropshire and she attended the Royal Show at Stoneleigh, Warwickshire on 30 June.

The Secretary of State also spoke at events important to rural and agricultural communities such as the Oxford Farming Conference in January, the Local Government Association's Rural Renewal Conference on 11 February and the annual conference of the National Farmers Union on 18 February.

My right hon. Friend receives a considerable number of invitations to agricultural shows and rural events. These are considered carefully, but the pressures on her diary are intense, including many meetings that relate directly to the interests of rural communities as well as the other demands of her wide-ranging portfolio.

I and my fellow Ministers at Defra undertake visits to a variety of agricultural shows and rural events. In doing so we seek to make them useful working visits in which we meet a range of organisations and individuals and hear about their work and experience rather than attendance just for the sake of it.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's policy is on the use of phosphates and nitrates in agriculture; and what action the Government is taking in regard to chemical run-off from farmland. [126727]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government's policy on the use of phosphates and nitrates is that they should be applied in accordance with good nutrient management practice, and in compliance with legal requirements. This ensures that the necessary quantities of nutrients are available when required for uptake by the crop and that losses to the environment are minimised. Defra supports the Fertiliser Advisers Certification and Training Scheme which trains and certifies people who advise farmers and growers on the appropriate use of fertilisers. Details on the optimum rate and timing for spreading phosphates and nitrates are contained within Defra booklet RB209 'Fertiliser Recommendations for Agricultural and Horticultural Crops'. Adoption of these recommendations helps to reduce the risk of applying more nutrients than the crop needs and thereby minimises the risk of run off. There is evidence that farmers are following these recommendations. Application rates of nitrogen, phosphate and the other major nutrient, potash have been lower in the past decade than in the 1980s, despite an increase in crop production.

The statutory Water Code (Defra PB0587) provides further essential guidance on the use and handling of fertilisers to minimise the risk of nutrient losses to water. Farmers operating in Nitrate Vulnerable Zones are obliged to implement Action Programme Measures, which are based largely on the Water Code.

Defra is currently undertaking a review of the problem of diffuse pollution of water by agriculture, to identify the most cost effective way to achieve further reductions in pollution to comply with the Water Framework Directive and safeguard conservation sites.

In collaboration with the EA and industry, Defray is developing a software tool to provide nutrient management decision support for farmers and advisers. The first version of the tool should be available next year, both as a module of existing farm management software packages and as a free stand-alone version.

The Government encourages the use of manure as a valuable fertiliser thus helping to reduce the use of chemical fertilisers. One of the ways in which this is done is through the availability of the MANNER (Manure Nitrogen Evaluation Routine) Decision Support System which helps farmers accurately predict the fertiliser nitrogen value of organic manures on a field specific basis.

Defra agri-environment schemes such as Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs), the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) and the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) fund management options which involve the reduction of input levels to grassland and arable farming systems. They also contain options such as buffer strips which benefit resource protection. ESAs and CSS are currently being reviewed in consultation with partners with a view to introducing a new scheme in 2005. It is proposed that resource protection should be an important objective of the new scheme.

In addition, Defra is currently piloting a new Entry Level Scheme which aims to introduce simple yet effective environmental measures across a wide area of farmland. The pilot scheme includes options to prepare nutrient and manure management plans and other on-farm management which will deliver resource protection benefits. Following an assessment of the pilot scheme we intend to draw up proposals to roll it out across England in 2005.

Animal By-Products Regulation

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to introduce secondary legislation to implement the European Animal By-Products Regulation. [114177]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 16 May 2003]*: The regulation is directly applicable in the UK. The national implementing legislation which came into force on

1 July does not repeat its provisions, but gives effect to the regulation by providing for offences, powers of entry, etc.

Because of the elections in Scotland and Wales the consultation on their implementing legislation was delayed. As yet it is not known exactly when the statutory instruments will be in place in the devolved areas, although I am advised that the Scottish Executive are working to a timetable of 1 October. We are working closely with the industry to ensure effective implementation.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received about animal welfare with respect to compulsory ear tags in livestock. [124524]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have recently consulted the pig, sheep and goat industry on proposed changes to the identification rules. The sheep and goat industry has expressed concern about the European Commission proposal to double tag lambs before 1 month of age. The pig industry has also expressed some concern about the proposal to implement the EU requirement to identify pigs before they leave the holding on which they were born with an ear tag or tattoo. We are considering the responses from industry.

We take animal welfare issues very seriously when considering changes to livestock identification rules. It is important to use a suitable style and size of tag for the breed of animal and care needs to be taken on its application and to ensure that tags are applied by appropriately trained personnel in accordance with manufacturers instructions.

Athens Treaty

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the treaty signed at Athens permitting application to the European membership of states there named, if he will place in the Library written statements and related charts and maps showing *(a)* the current sea areas of national and community waters and those that would become so in the event of accession of all relevant application states, *(b)* those areas lost to current national control and *(c)* the principal ports and coastal zones where fisheries are of economic or social importance. [126424]

Mr. Bradshaw: I am not aware that any such charts or maps exist. A copy of the treaty signed in Athens was presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by Command of Her Majesty on 30 April as Command Paper 5805. It has been placed in the Library of the House. I can confirm that all acceding countries accepted the fisheries acquis, Article 17 of which gives rules on access to waters. No areas were lost from UK control. No information on point *(c)* in relation to the acceding member states is to hand, and to assemble it would entail unjustifiable expense.

Beef Imports

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much beef has been imported in each of the last three years from Australia. [126235]

Mr. Bradshaw: The following table shows the UK imports of beef from Australia during the years 2000, 2001 and 2002.

	Thousand tonnes	*£ million*
2000	5.8	17.2
2001	5.7	15.6
2002	5.5	15.7

Note:
Data prepared by Statistics (Commodities and Food) Accounts and Trade, ESD, DEFRA.
Source:
HM Customs and Excise.

Bovine TB

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cattle were slaughtered owing to bovine TB in each of the last 10 years; how many were subsequently found to be negative; and what the cost was to the Government of compensating farmers for the slaughter of cattle subsequently found to be negative in each year. [126335]

Mr. Bradshaw: Information on compensation is held only for overall expenditure, not in the form requested. The remaining information requested is shown in the following table:

Number of cattle slaughtered in GB under bovine TB control measures and compensation paid 1993–2002

	(a) Number of animals slaughtered under TB Control Measures (Reactors plus direct contacts)	*(b) Cases where TB was not confirmed*	*(c) Total amount of compensation paid (£)*
1993	2,455	1,650	2,081,436
1994	2,773	1,600	2,019,911
1995	2,896	1,600	1,988,820
1996	3,881	2,270	2,275,481
1997	3,760	2,160	2,386,029
1998	5,863	3,420	3,605,242
1999	6,772	3,760	5,770,983
2000	8,353	4,480	7,307,797
2001	6,258	3,820	7,074,125
2002	22,886	15,980	23,138,512

Note:
1. Columns *(a)* & *(c)* are compiled from data published in the Chief Veterinary Officer's annual reports on Animal Health.
2. Column *(b)* is compiled from data available from Defra's computer systems. Base data for 1993 and 1994 cannot be validated, and figures for all years cannot be reconciled with published data and have therefore been rounded. The figures show the number of cases where TB was not confirmed (rather than 'negative' cases). Post mortem examinations are less than 100% sensitive so failure to detect visible lesions or culture Mycobacterium bovis (M. bovis) from samples does not confirm the absence of infection or that the animal has not been exposed to M. bovis. The figures also include cases where culture results are still outstanding and where samples were not taken.
3. In 2001, the TB testing and control programme was largely suspended due to the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak. Since testing resumed in 2002, resources have been concentrated on herds with overdue TB tests that would have had a longer period in which to contract the disease. Also the proportion of

high risk herds being tested post-FMD is greater than that prior to the outbreak. As a result, the numbers of TB reactors identified and slaughtered in 2001 and 2002 are not comparable with previous years.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had on the efficacy of skin tests for bovine TB; and what assessment she has made of the benefits of blood tests for bovine TB. [126336]

Mr. Bradshaw: The single intradermal comparative cervical test (SICCT) is the only skin test currently used in Great Britain for the detection of TB in cattle. This test and the less specific single intradermal test (SIT) were, until recently, the only TB tests officially recognised by the European Union for use in cattle. The skin tests, along with the application of disease control principles, have achieved TB eradication in many countries.

Last October, we begun a field evaluation of the gamma-interferon test, an in-vitro assay that measures the immune response to M. bovis of T-cells in cattle blood. This laboratory-based blood test was officially recognised by the EU in July 2002, but only for use as a supplement to the SICCT in TB affected herds. The test is considered more sensitive than the SICCT, but less specific, meaning that it results in a higher probability of false positives. For this reason, the gamma interferon test cannot be used as a screening test for TB for the time being.

Diagnostic tests are never 100 per cent. accurate and there is often a trade-off between sensitivity and specificity. Although the gamma interferon test is not sufficiently specific to replace the SICCT, the use of the two tests in parallel has the potential to significantly increase the detection of infected cattle in herds where TB has been confirmed.

I discussed the issue of TB diagnosis, particularly in relation to the progress of the gamma interferon trial, at a recent meeting with Professor Bourne, Chairman of the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB.

Canada Geese

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many licences have been issued in respect of controlling Canada geese in each of the last five years. [126016]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 protects all wild birds and implements the EC Birds Directive in Great Britain. Under article 9(3) of the directive we are required to send a report to the Commission on the implementation of Article 9, undertaken through section 16 of the 1981 Act.

The figures for the last five years are as follows:

	Number
1998	74
1999	87
2000	90
2001	106
2002	157

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many licences in respect of controlling Canada geese have been issued to the British Airport Authority in the last five years. [126017]

Mr. Bradshaw: In the last five years the Department has issued a total of 58 licences specifically for air safety. This represents the total number of licences issued rather than those specifically issued to the British Airport Authority.

Carbon Trading Scheme

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to ensure that the price of carbon purchase in the UK carbon trading scheme does not fall below a level at which the mechanisms of the scheme cease to operate effectively. [126917]

Mr. Morley: Defra, as scheme regulator, has no plans to intervene in UK Emissions Trading Scheme (UK ETS) market activity. Like any market, the UK ETS allowance price is determined by actual supply and demand of allowances. Participants in the scheme are likely to trade based on profit maximisation decisions and so it is unlikely that prices would drop to a level at which market activity ceases. For a one year old voluntary scheme, there has been an encouraging amount of liquidity and stability in the fledgling market. First year results are published at http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange/trading/index.htm

Cattle Passports

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cattle passports there are in the United Kingdom. [126236]

Alun Michael: On 1 July 2003 9,687,710 live animals were registered on the Cattle Tracing System (CTS) as having passports.

Common Agricultural Policy

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the recently agreed package of CAP reforms on *(a)* tenant farmers in England, *(b)* tenant farmers in the rest of the UK, *(c)* landlords of tenant farms, *(d)* family farms which do not employ non-family workers and *(e)* farmers as a whole. [126224]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* As a result of the CAP reform agreement reached on 26 June, we estimate that for UK farmers as a whole there will be an increase in incomes of up to £280 million, which represents 12 per cent. of total income from farming in 2002. Restructuring of businesses and greater efficiency encouraged by decoupling might give rise to further improvements. Overall, this is estimated to be worth £270 million, but is likely to be shared between producers, consumers and businesses in other sectors. A breakdown of these figures for the sectors listed by the hon. Member is not available.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* rules and *(b)* restrictions will apply to (i) tenant farmers and (ii) non-tenant farmers who seek to transfer to another holding their own single payment entitlements created under the recently agreed package of CAP reforms. [126226]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* In general, single payment entitlements will take the form of a designated amount per hectare for certain number of hectares and be allocated on the basis of farmers' average claims under the existing CAP direct aid schemes in the reference period 2000–02. The annual claim for payment against each entitlement will need to be accompanied by an eligible hectare, which may be on the holding that gave rise to the entitlement or on any other holding in the same member state. We expect "eligible hectare" to be defined as any agricultural area of the holding taken up by arable land and permanent pasture except areas under permanent crops, forests or used for non-agricultural purposes. Cross-compliance conditions will apply to those hectares and all other agricultural land on the holding. Those rules and restrictions will apply to tenants and non-tenants alike. A new management committee may establish additional detailed rules at EU level.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to *(a)* permit and *(b)* enable the implementation of the opportunity to buy and sell single payment entitlements as established under the recently agreed CAP reform package in respect of (i) tenant farmers, (ii) landlords of tenant farms, (iii) owner occupied farms and (iv) all farms. [126228]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* Farmers, whether tenants or owner occupiers, will be able to sell the single payment entitlements allocated to them once they have fulfilled the relevant conditions in claiming payment on at least 80 per cent. of those entitlements in one year. Sale may also be possible once entitlement holders have voluntarily given up to the national reserve all the entitlements that they have not claimed in the first year of operation of the single payment scheme. Landlords of tenant farmers will only be able to sell entitlements that they are either allocated to them in their own right as a result of claims for CAP direct aids during the scheme reference period or purchased by them once the scheme is introduced. All sales may take place with or without land and will only be permissible if they are to another farmer within the same member state. Member states may further restrict sales to farmers within the same region.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average price differential between Common Agricultural Policy prices and world market prices are for *(a)* wheat, *(b)* beef, *(c)* sheep meat, *(d)* oats and *(e)* sugar beet. [125754]

Mr. Bradshaw: The OECD calculates the difference between EU prices under the Common Agricultural Policy and indicative world market prices. The latest published estimates are for 2001 and these show differentials as follows: common wheat, €4.1 per tonne; beef, €1,727.8 per tonne; sheep meat, €2,220 per tonne; oats, €28.6 per tonne; sugar beet €23.3 per tonne.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average tariff on agricultural produce from Africa into the EU was in the last year for which figures are available. [125755]

Mr. Bradshaw: The detailed information on tariff revenues is not readily available to enable the calculation of the average tariff.

A significant number of African countries are eligible for tariff concessions on exports to the European Union. Some of the least developed African countries qualify for the Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative. This arrangement grants duty-free access to imports of all products (except munitions) without any quantitative restrictions (with the exception of imports of bananas, rice and cane sugar which are being gradually liberalised). Thirty-three African countries qualify for the EBA preferential tariff rates.

Other African countries qualify for preferential access under the terms of the Cotonou Agreement which provides African, Caribbean and Pacific countries with preferential access to EU markets for a wide range of agricultural commodities. Seventy-seven countries are signatories to the Cotonou Agreement and 48 of these are African Nations.

In addition, the EU offers a number of tariff quotas, whereby a preferential rate of tariff is offered on a specified level of imports; and bilateral agreements, where bilateral preferences are offered between the EU and a third country.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps will be taken to improve access to EU markets for agricultural produce from the developing world under the current proposals for Common Agricultural Policy reform. [125756]

Mr. Bradshaw: The proposals for Common Agricultural Policy reform were agreed on 26 June. They did not address market access for developing countries but agreement on them enables the EU to play a full part in negotiating new WTO arrangements on agriculture at the WTO Ministerial Meeting in Cancun in September. A better deal for developing countries is a key part of the Government's objectives for that meeting.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the three highest agricultural tariffs on imports into the EU were in the last year for which figures are available, broken down by *(a)* product and *(b)* percentage tariff. [125757]

Mr. Bradshaw: Tariffs on imports to the EU can include both ad valorem and specific components. To compare the relative magnitude of tariffs it necessary to convert them into ad valorem equivalents (the tariff expressed as a proportion of the import price).

The World Trade Organisation database provides estimates of the rate of duty on a range of individual tariff lines. The three highest calculated tariffs on

agricultural products imported into the EU in 2000, identified from the WTO data, are shown in the following table. This average gives only an approximate indication of the tariff rate and may be subject to substantial changes as the price of a commodity will vary from consignment to consignment.

Highest calculated rates of duty on agricultural imports into the EU (2000)

CN code	*Description*	*Rate of duty*		*Estimated duty rate*	
		1/1–30/6	*1/7–31/12*	*1/1–30/6*	*1/7–31/12*
0402 21 99	Milk and cream in solid forms, of a fat content by weight of more than 27 %, unsweetened, in immediate packings of more than 2.5kg	177.1 €/100kg	161.9 €/100kg	127	471
0206 29 91	Frozen edible bovine thick and thin skirt (excl. for manufacture of pharmaceutical products)	14% + 332.6 €/100kg	12.8% + 304.1 €/100kg	220	186
0204 42 10	Frozen sheep short forequarters	14% + 98.7 €/100kg	12.8% + 90.2 €/100kg	67	294

Source:
WTO Integrated database.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent proposals the UK has tabled in the EU to improve access for agricultural products from Africa into the EU. [125758]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government was a leading proponent of the EU Everything But Arms agreement under which, the world's 48 least developed countries, many of which are African, are given unrestricted duty-free access to EU markets. We are also actively supporting the EU's current WTO proposal, which calls for all developed countries to adopt similar initiatives and to allow duty-free access for at least 50 per cent. of their total imports from developing countries.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for redeployment of members of her Department out of London and the South East. [125357]

Alun Michael: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 11 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 1021W.

Drinking Water Inspectorate

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what comparative studies of the health impact of bottled and tap water the Drinking Water Inspectorate have conducted recently. [126551]

Mr. Morley: The Drinking Water Inspectorate has not commissioned any comparative studies on the health impact of bottled water and tap water.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the safe limits are used by the Drinking Water Inspectorate for *(a)* minerals and *(b)* other trace elements found in bottled waters. [126624]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that the Natural Mineral Water, Spring Water and Bottled Drinking Water Regulations 1999 (as amended) set safe limits for a wide range of minerals, including trace elements, in bottled waters.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of companies producing tap water are tested by the Drinking Water Inspectorate; what the frequency of testing is; how many companies producing tap water have failed these tests in each of the last six years; and what the safe limits are used by the Drinking Water Inspectorate for *(a)* minerals and *(b)* other trace elements found in tap water. [126625]

Mr. Morley: The role of the DWI is to audit all the statutory water companies in England and Wales. The companies are required to undertake sampling and analysis of public water supplies in accordance with the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 and subsequent amendments. These Regulations set out the frequency of monitoring, the locations where the samples have to be taken and the standards that have to be met. The regulatory standards incorporate those set out in the EC Directive on the quality of water intended for human consumption (80/778/EEC), which in turn are based on the World Health Organisation guideline values for drinking water quality. There are currently 26 water companies. In the last six years water companies have only experienced occasional failures of a standard. The level of compliance for all water companies rose from 99.75 per cent. in 1997 to 99.87% in 2002. The WHO guideline values for various constituents of drinking water, including certain minerals, represent the concentration of a constituent that does not result in any significant risk to consumers' health, usually over a lifetime of consumption.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of brands of bottled water are tested by the Drinking Water Inspectorate; what the frequency of testing is; and how many brands have failed these tests in each of the last six years. [126628]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that local authorities enforce the Natural Mineral Water, Spring Water and Bottled Drinking Water Regulations 1999 (as amended) which specify the frequency of testing for each of the three forms of bottled water. No central information is held on the results of these tests.

A survey of bottled waters published by the Food Standards Agency in August 2002 showed that none of the 161 samples tested for antimony, arsenic, nickel or bromate contained these substances above the limits in the regulations.

Emissions Targets

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress the UK has made in reducing carbon dioxide emissions under the Kyoto Protocol; and what assessment she has made of the impact of the proposed expansion of UK airports on meeting the targets. [126740]

Mr. Morley: The UK's target under the Kyoto Protocol is to reduce emissions in a basket of six greenhouse gases to 12.5 per cent. below the base year level by 2008–12.

Data for emissions of the basket of six greenhouse gases for 2001, submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in April 2003, show that emissions fell by 12.3 per cent. between the base year and 2001. Emissions of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas fell by 5.3 per cent. between 1990 and 2001. Emissions of carbon dioxide for 2002 are provisionally estimated at 8 to 9 per cent. below the 1990 level. Total greenhouse gas emissions in 2002 are estimated to have been between 14–15 per cent. below the 1990 level, taking this provisional carbon dioxide estimate into account.

A decision on whether any additional airport capacity should be provided, and if so how much, will be reached later this year and set out in the Air Transport White Paper. The environmental effects of aviation and the implications for the UK's international commitments, including those under the Kyoto Protocol, will be taken into account in reaching these decisions.

Energy Consumption

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the "Sustainable Development Strategy—A Better Quality of Life" paper, with particular reference to the recommendations for reducing corporate energy consumption. [124388]

Mr. Bradshaw: The 1999 strategy for sustainable development for the UK, "A better quality of life", sets out key UK Government actions to achieve sustainable development, including those to achieve more prudent use of energy by the business sector. They have been taken forward in the following ways.

The Climate Change Levy was launched in April 2001 to help fund measures to promote energy efficiency in business and the public sector. As part of the CCL package a number of measures were introduced including:

The EGA scheme offering tax incentives to firms investing in approved energy saving technologies.

The Carbon Trust (CT) was launched "to take the lead on energy efficiency for business and the public sector, and to support the development of a low carbon economy", delivered through the trust's two main programmes: the Low Carbon Innovation Programme, and Action Energy (formerly the non-domestic part of the Energy Efficiency Best Practice programme) the UK's main energy efficiency information, advice and research programme for organisations in the public and private sectors. Since 1989, the EEBPP has helped many organisations save up to 20 per cent. of their energy bills, which equates to total UK energy savings of around £800 million a year.

Envirowise (formerly the Environmental Technology Best Practice Programme) is the main programme promoting the resource efficiency message to business. Since it was established in 1994, the EETBP has helped UK business make resource efficiency savings of approximately £800 million.

A review of "A better quality of life" has just started, to have a revised strategy in place by 2005. We intend to take a fresh look at how we achieve sustainable development in the UK, building on the current strategy to improve delivery.

Energy Crops

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what effect the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy will have on the support given to the growing of energy crops, with particular reference to the use of set-aside land. [125422]

Mr. Bradshaw: Under the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, which will come into effect on 1 January 2005, it will still be possible to grow energy crops on set-aside land and to receive payments under the new Single Payment Scheme. If energy crops are grown on non set-aside land payments under the new Single Payment Scheme plus the new €45 per hectare energy crops payment will be available. The energy crops payment is limited to an area of 1.5 million hectares for the EU as a whole and aid will be reduced if production exceeds that area.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many of the Department's policies have been screened for their environmental impact since June 2001; how many environmental appraisals have been conducted, and on what policy issues; and what information has been published about these screenings and appraisals. [124712]

Mr. Morley: The Integrated Policy Appraisal (IPA) tool is being piloted within Defra and allows policymakers to assess the environmental impacts of their policies. In addition, new guidance on Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA), published by the Cabinet Office in January 2003, requires policy to be appraised for its anticipated environmental impacts, as well as social and economic ones; in order to deliver on the Government's commitment to sustainable development.

Up to date figures for the number of IPAs and those RIAs which contain an assessment of environmental impacts, are not currently available. We are planning to collate this information over the summer and I will respond with the figure in the Autumn.

All completed RIAs are published on the Defra website at www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/ria/default.htm.

EU Bio-waste Directive

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which stakeholders the Government have *(a)* consulted and *(b)* plan to consult on proposals for an EU Bio-waste Directive; and if she will make a statement. [125124]

Mr. Morley: The Government discussed the EU Working Document on Biological Treatment of Bio-waste with interested parties when it was published in 2000. We will consult stakeholders formally when a draft Directive is produced, which is not expected until 2004.

EU Committees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list *(a)* the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU committee on certificates of specific character for agricultural products and foodstuffs, *(b)* the number of times, and the dates, on which it has met since January 2002, *(c)* the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, *(d)* the decisions it has made since January 2002 and *(e)* the means used to communicate the decisions to the House. [110302]

Mr. Bradshaw: The EU committee on certificates of specific character for agricultural products and foodstuffs does not have a fixed membership, but consists of delegates drawn from each of the 15 European member states.

The Committee has met only once since January 2002, on 22 July 2002, to discuss amendments to the current Commission regulation setting out the detailed rules for the administration of the scheme. These discussions are continuing.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU committee on geographical indications and protected designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs, the number of times and the dates on which it has met since January 2002, the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, the decisions it has made since January 2002 and the means used to communicate these decisions to the House. [110489]

Mr. Bradshaw: The EU committee on geographical indications and protected designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs does not have a fixed membership, but consists of delegates drawn from each of the 15 European member states. Since 17 April 2003, delegates from the 10 EU accession states have also been invited to attend meetings.

The Committee has met on the following dates since January 2002: 9 April 2002, 16 May 2002, 22 July 2002, 5 February 2003, and 4 June 2003. It discusses a range of issues relating to the operation of the scheme as well as particular applications such as whether or not feta cheese should be registered as a Protected Designation of Origin. The Committee also considered the implications of Judgments from the European Court of Justice relating to Parma Ham and Parmigiano Reggiano.

Any legislative proposals are submitted to Parliament under established scrutiny procedures and are considered and reported on by the House of Lords European Union Committee, the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee and the devolved administrations in Wales and Scotland. This happened in the case of the proposal to register feta cheese.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU Standing Veterinary Committee, the number of times and the dates on which it has met since January 2002, the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, the decisions it has made since January 2002 and the means used to communicate these decisions to the House. [110495]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH), which was known as the Standing Veterinary Committee prior to March 2002, has met 46 times between 1 January 2002 and 7 July 2003. The meetings are attended by veterinary and technical experts from all Member States, Norway, Iceland and, more recently, Accession States. The Chief Veterinary Officer is the official representative for the UK although a deputy usually attends in his place.

The agendas cover a wide variety of animal and public health issues. The Committee can adopt secondary legislation in the form of Commission Decisions and Regulations. Most Decisions are adopted to address immediate but routine disease or contamination problems within the EU or in non EU countries and it is therefore not appropriate to communicate such decisions to the House. There have, however, been rare occasions since January 2002 where issues before the Committee have been subject to Parliamentary Scrutiny.

Full reports of SVC and SCoFCAH meetings including details of the decisions can be viewed on the Commission website. The addresses are:

www.europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/rc/svc/index en.html and www.europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/rc/scfcah/ahaw/index en.html

EU Constitution

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effects of the proposed European Constitution upon the UK's environmental policy; and if she will make a statement. [126763]

Mr. Morley: The Convention's proposals would have no direct effect on the UK's environment policy, and would leave environmental policy at EU level largely unchanged. Environmental matters handled at EU level would generally continue to be subject to co-decision

with the European Parliament and to Qualified Majority Voting within the Council of Ministers. The draft of the new treaty prepared by the Convention on Future of Europe for discussion at the Inter Governmental Conference this Autumn retains the key provisions of the current treaties that refer to the environment and to the need for environmental protection requirements to be taken into account in other Community policies with a view to promoting sustainable development.

The UK is also opposed to the proposal to establish a Single Legislative Council. This would weaken the direct involvement of the Environment Ministers in policy formation as well as in negotiating environmental legislation.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the EU directives implemented by the Department since 8 June 2001. [126589]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs plays a leading role in the UK's EU policy on the environment , agriculture, fisheries, animal and plant health. Since 8 June 2001, this Department has led on the implementation of 76 directives. The following table shows the directives implemented during the period.

Details of all directives implemented can be found on the Eur-Lex database available on the European Union's website.

Directive number	*Directive name*	*Policy area*	*Date agreed*	*Actual UK*
1991/338/EEC	Amending for the 10th time Directive 76/769/EEC on the approximation of laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States relating to restrictions on the marketing and use of certain dangerous substances and preparations	Env	18 June 1991	28 April 2003
1996/061/EC	Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control	Env	24 September 1996	6 March 2003
1996/062/EC	Ambient air quality assessment and management	Env	27 September 1996	19 July 2002
1997/049/EC	Conversation of wild birds	Env	28 July 1997	20 December 2001
1997/078/EC	Laying down the principles governing the organisation of veterinary checks on products entering the Community from third countries	Agri	18 September 1997	6 December 2002
1997/079/EC	Organisation of veterinary checks on products entering the Community from third countries	Agri	18 December 1997	6 December 2002
1998/058/EC	Protection of farmed animals	Agri	6 April 1998	27 November 2001
1998/083/EC	Drinking Water Directive	Env	3 November 1998	20 December 2002
1998/095/EC	Genetically modified plant varieties	Agri	14 December 1998	25 February 2002
1998/096/EC	Unofficial field inspections	Agri	14 December 1998	25 February 2002
1999/008/EC	Marketing of cereal seed	Agri	18 February 1999	15 November 2001
1999/022/EC	Keeping of wild animals in zoos	Env	29 March 1999	22 April 2003
1999/030/EC	Limit Values for sulphur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen and lead in ambient air	Env	22 April 1999	1 August 2002
1999/032/EC	Sulphur content of certain liquid fuels	Env	26 April 1999	1 March 2002
1999/051/EC	Restrictions on the marketing and use of certain dangerous substances and preparations (tin, PCP and cadmium)	Env	26 May 1999	10 April 2003
1999/054/EC	Marketing of cereal seed	Env	26 May 1999	1 November 2001
1999/071/EC	Fixing of maximum levels of pesticide residues	Agri	14 July 1999	25 February 2002
1999/072/EC	Protection against zoonoses	Agri	29 July 1999	11 June 2001
1999/074/EC	Protection of laying hens	Agri	19 July 1999	3 September 2002
2000/015/EC	Amending Council Directive 64/432/EC on health problems affecting intra-Community trade in bovine animals and swine	Agri	8 May 2000	6 September 2002
2000/020/EC	Animal health products affecting intra-Community trade in bovine animals	Agri	16 May 2000	25 February 2002
2000/024/EC	Fixing maximum levels of pesticide residues	Agri	28 April 2000	28 February 2002
2000/027/EC	Control of fish diseases	Agri	2 May 2000	28 February 2002
2000/029/EC	Protective measures against the introduction into the Community of organisms harmful to plants products and against their spread within the community	Agri	8 May 2000	6 September 2002
2000/037/EC	Veterinary medicinal products	Agri	5 June 2000	28 February 2002
2000/042/EC	Fixing maximum levels of pesticide residues	Agri	22 June 2000	28 February 2002
2000/048/EC	Fixing maximum levels of pesticide residues	Agri	5 July 2000	28 February 2002
2000/049/EC	Placing plant protection products on the market	Agri	26 July 2000	17 August 2001
2000/050/EC	Placing plant protection products on the market	Agri	26 July 2000	17 August 2001
2000/057/EC	Fixing maximum levels of pesticide residues	Agri	22 September 2000	28 February 2002
2000/058/EC	Fixing maximum levels of pesticide residues	Agri	22 September 2000	28 February 2002
2000/080/EC	Placing plant protection products on the market	Agri	4 December 2000	25 February 2002
2000/081/EC	Fixing maximum levels of pesticide residues	Agri	18 December 2000	25 February 2002
2000/082/EC	Fixing maximum levels of pesticide residues	Agri	20 December 2000	25 February 2002
2001/010/EC	Scrapie	Agri	22 May 2001	17 August 2001
2001/018/EC	Deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms	Env	12 March 2001	14 March 2003
2001/021/EC	Placing plant protection products on the market	Agri	5 March 2001	25 February 2002
2001/028/EC	Placing plant protection products on the market	Agri	20 April 2001	25 February 2002
2001/032/EC	Recognising protected zones exposed to a particular plant health risks in the Community and repealing Directive 92/76/EEC	Agri	8 May 2001	28 February 2002
2001/033/EC	Organisms harmful to plants	Agri	8 February 2001	28 February 2002
2001/035/EC	Fixing maximum levels of pesticide residues	Agri	11 May 2001	25 February 2002
2001/036/EC	Placing plant protection products on the market	Agri	16 May 2001	25 February 2002
2001/039/EC	Fixing maximum levels of pesticide residues	Agri	23 May 2001	25 February 2002

Directive number	Directive name	Policy area	Date agreed	Actual UK
2001/047/EC	Placing plant protection products on the market	Agri	25 June 2001	25 February 2002
2001/048/EC	Fixing maximum levels of pesticide residues	Agri	28 June 2001	25 February 2002
2001/049/EC	Placing plant protection products on the market	Agri	28 June 2001	25 February 2002
2001/057/EC	Fixing maximum levels of pesticide residues	Agri	25 July 2001	25 February 2002
2001/064/EC	Marketing of fodder plant seed and cereal seed	Agri	31 August 2001	5 March 2003
2001/081/EC	National emission ceilings for certain atmospheric pollutants	Env	23 October 2001	10 January 2003
2001/082/EC	Community code relating to veterinary medicine products	Agri	6 November 2001	31 March 2003
2001/091/EC	Restrictions on the marketing and use of certain dangerous substances and preparations (hexachloroethane)	Env	29 October 2001	30 June 2003
2001/099/EC	Amending Annex I to Council Directive 91/414/EEC concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market to include glyphosate and thifensulfuron-methyl as active substances	Agri	20 November 2001	22 October 2002
2001/103/EC	Amending Annex I to Council Directive 91/414/EEC concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market to include 2,4 dichlorophenoxy acetic acid(2,4-D) as an active substance	Agri	28 November 2001	22 October 2002
2001/109/EC	Statistical surveys to be carried out by Member States to determine potential of certain species of fruit trees	Agri	16 January 2002	15 May 2002
2002/005/EC	Amending Annex II to Council Directive 90/642/EEC as regards the fixing of maximum levels for pesticide residues in and on certain products of plant origin, including fruit and vegetables	Agri	30 January 2002	1 September 2002
2002/008/EC	Minimum conditions for examining vegetables and agricultural residues	Agri	6 February 2002	12 April 2002
2002/018/EC	Amending Annex I to Council Directive 91/414/EEC concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market to include isoproturon as an active substance	Agri	22 February 2002	22 October 2002
2002/023/EC	Fixing of maximum levels for pesticide residues in and on cereals, foodstuffs of animal origin and certain products of plant origin, including fruit and vegetables respectively	Agri	26 February 2002	19 September 2002
2002/028/EC	Protective measures against the introduction into the Community of organisms harmful to plants or plant products and against their spread within the community	Agri	19 March 2002	24 September 2002
2002/029/EC	Amending Directive 2001/32/EC as regards certain protected zones exposed to particular plant health risks in the community	Agri	19 March 2002	24 September 2002
2002/031/EC	Energy labelling of household air conditioners	Env	22 March 2002	14 March 2003
2002/033/EC	Amending Directives 90/425/EEC and 92/118/EEC as regards health requirements for animal by-products	Agri	21 October 2002	30 June 2003
2002/037/EC	Amending Council Directive 91/414/EEC to include ethofumesate as an active substance	Agri	3 May 2002	6 March 2003
2002/040/EC	Commission Directive 2002/040/EC implementing Council Directive 92/75/EEC with regard to energy labelling of household electric ovens	Env	8 May 2002	14 March 2003
2002/042/EC	Fixing maximum levels of pesticide residues	Agri	17 May 2002	11 April 2003
2002/048/EC	Amending Council Directive 91/414/EEC to include iprovalicarb, prosulfuron and sulfosulfuron as active substances	Agri	30 May 2002	6 March 2003
2002/062/EC	Adapting to technical progress for the ninth time Annex I to Council Directive 76/769/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States on marketing and use of (organostannic compounds)	Env	9 July 2002	14 March 2003
2002/063/EC	Establishing community methods of sampling for the official control of pesticides residues in and on products of the plant and animal origin and repealing Directive 79/700/EEC	Agri	16 July 2002	7 April 2003
2002/064/EC	Amending Council Directive 91/414/EEC to include cinidon-ethyl, cyhalofop butyl, famoxadone, florasulam, metalaxyl-M and picolinafen as active substances	Agri	15 July 2002	7 April 2003
2002/066/EC	Amending the Annexes to Directive 76/895/EEC, 86/363/EEC and 90/642/EEC as regards the fixing of maximum levels for pesticides residues in and on fruit and vegetables	Agri	16 July 2002	11 April 2003
2002/071/EC	Non Transposition of Directive 2002/71/EC: Fixing of maximum levels for pesticides residues(fromthion, dimethoate and oxydemetonmethyl)	Agri	19 August 2002	11 April 2003
2002/076/EC	Incineration of waste	Agri	6 September 2002	11 April 2003
2002/079/EC	Non Transposition of Commission Directive 2002/79/EC amending the Annexes to Council Directives 76/895/EEC, 86/362/EEC, 86/363/EEC and 90/642/EEC as regards fixing of maximum levels for certain pesticides residues	Agri	2 October 2002	15 April 2003
2002/081/EC	Amending Council Directive 91/414/EEC to include flumioxazine as an active substance (Plant Protection Products)	Agri	10 October 2002	7 April 2003
2002/097/EC	Amending the annexes to council directives 86/362/EEC.86/363/EEC and 90/642/EEC Fixing of maximum levels of pesticide in cereal and foodstuff in products of animal and plant origin	Agri	16 December 2002	15 April 2003
2002/100/EC	Maximum residue levels in azoxystrobin	Agri	20 December 2002	15 April 2003

Fallen Stock

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made on the subscription system for fallen stock disposal; how much the system will cost the Department; and how many farmers have signed up for fallen stock. [125037]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government is currently considering whether a national scheme for fallen stock is viable and will be making an announcement about this shortly.

In response to the consultation exercise carried out in May, around 33,000 livestock farmers in England expressed interest in joining a subscription scheme, just over 30 per cent. of those who were consulted.

If a scheme were to go ahead Defra has said that it would be prepared to contribute up to £5 million in the first year decreasing to zero by the end of the third year. This is in addition to the £30 million that the Government already pays for collecting and disposing of cattle for BSE testing purposes.

Fertiliser

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what tonnage of fertiliser was used in agriculture in the United Kingdom during 2002. [126237]

Mr. Bradshaw: Data on fertiliser usage are not collected on a UK basis. The annual British Survey of Fertiliser Practice provides information on fertiliser use on the major crops and grass grown in mainland Britain. Data for 2002 are currently undergoing analysis and will not be available until the autumn.

Fisheries

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects *(a)* to complete and *(b)* to publish the Strategy Unit's report on the fishing industry. [126583]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Strategy Unit project on the UK fishing industry aims to be completed by the end of the year, when its final report will be published.

A consultation paper has already been published on the unit's website www.strategy.gov.uk. This builds on, and follows, a series of face-to-face meetings with industry representatives across the UK.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many British fishermen have had their licences bought out under the aid scheme approved by the European Commission on 11 June; and what assistance the Government will give to fishermen and vessel owners whose licences are bought out. [126769]

Mr. Bradshaw: 52 of the 68 salmon drift netsmen remaining in the North East coast salmon drift net fishery have accepted a voluntary compensation scheme to give up their drift net licences to reduce exploitation of this mixed stock. The scheme was open only to those who held a drift net licence to fish off the North East coast of England. The Government are contributing £1.25 million over the years 2003–04 with the remainder of the £3.4 million needed to fund this buy-out being raised by private interests.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what estimate she has made of the number of fishermen who will lose their jobs due to new regulations introduced under the Restrictive Shellfish Licensing Scheme in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the UK; [126822]

(2) whether there is a provision to ease fishing regulations through the Restrictive Shellfish Licensing Scheme if waters are restocked; [126823]

(3) whether compensation will be paid for the loss of fishermen's incomes arising from the Restrictive Shellfish Licensing Scheme; and whether there will be separate provision for Welsh fishermen. [126824]

Mr. Bradshaw: All fishermen with a fishing vessel licensed by one of the four Fisheries Departments in the UK, will be given an entitlement to fish for crabs, lobsters and crawfish under the Restrictive Shellfish Licensing Scheme subject to demonstrating that they have landed and sold more than 200kg of lobsters or crawfish, or 750kg of crabs in a 12 month rolling period between 1 January 1998 and 31 December 2002. Those fishermen with a licensed fishing vessel who do not meet the criteria will nevertheless be entitled to catch 5 lobsters and 25 crabs per day. It is not expected that employment for fishermen in Wales or the UK will be at risk as a result of these arrangements.

This Department has no plans to provide compensation for fishermen who do not qualify for the Scheme. By preventing excessive effort increases in the future which would threaten crab and lobster stocks, the Scheme should in fact help to maintain the employment of fishermen whose livelihood depends on them.

The possibility of course exists to vary the requirements of the Scheme in future: the additional information we shall be obtaining on shellfishing activity as a result of the Scheme will enable us to consider, in consultation with interested parties, how this might be done.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the National Assembly for Wales on the Restrictive Shellfish Licensing Scheme and its effects on the local economy; and what representations she has received from Welsh fishermen. [126825]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Welsh Assembly Government has been fully involved in all stages of the development and implementation of the Restrictive Shellfish Licensing Scheme.

Representations have been received from the North Western and North Wales Sea Fisheries Committee, South and West Wales Fishing Communities Ltd., and a number of Welsh fishermen. These relate to the eligibility criteria for the scheme and how this will impact, in particular, on those who fish on a seasonal basis for shellfish.

Fuel Poverty

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of *(a)* whether there is a need to increase the budget for the warm front programme and *(b)* whether the fuel poverty reduction targets will be met. [126717]

Mr. Bradshaw: A budget of £156 million has been made available to tackle fuel poverty in the current financial year. This will enable continued delivery of energy efficiency measures to some of the most vulnerable members of society. It will also help us to achieve our PSA target of assisting 600,000 households between 2001 and 2004.

Government's first Annual Report on Progress under the Fuel Poverty Strategy showed good progress in the reduction of the number of households in fuel poverty. We are committed to report annually. Future budgets for tackling fuel poverty will be considered as part of the normal process.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the current state is of her farm trials of genetically modified organisms; and when she intends to report on these; [126415]

(2) when the results of her field trials of genetically modified organisms will be published. [126570]

Mr. Morley: The GM crop farm-scale evaluation (FSE) trials for spring-sown maize, beet and oil seed rape have been completed. The results are currently being peer reviewed by the independent scientific journal 'The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society'.

We currently anticipate that the results will be published not before late September. However, as is always the case with such publications, this is entirely at the discretion of the journal and subject to their acceptance of the scientific papers. Winter oil seed rape results are due in 2004.

On the day of publication the independent Scientific Steering Committee that has overseen the FSEs and the research team that has conducted the work will hold an afternoon meeting at which the results will be presented to the wider scientific community and members of the public, followed by a question and answer session.

Copies of the scientific papers will be made available as will a short non-specialist summary of the results written by the research consortium and approved by the independent Scientific Steering Committee.

This initial meeting will be followed by a second meeting hosted by the independent Scientific Steering Committee some weeks later, at which the public and wider scientific community will again have an opportunity to hear the results and ask questions.

On publication of the results the scientific steering committee will publish its advice to ministers signifying the completion of the FSEs. The results will immediately be forwarded to the Government's statutory advisory body on the release of GMOs, the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE), who will advise on the implications of the results for the possible commercial cultivation of the crops in question. Before ACRE formulate their advice they will hold an open meeting at which they will take evidence from experts and stakeholders.

Further details of how copies of the final report can be obtained, and how stakeholders and the public can attend the events or submit evidence to ACRE, will be announced in due course, and will also be published on the farm scale evaluation website at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/fse.

Global Environmental Policy

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* US and *(b)* European colleagues on the progress of global environmental policy. [126731]

Mr. Morley: During 2003, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had discussions with US and EU colleagues to take forward global environmental policy and international sustainable development in the following fora: the G8 Environment Ministers meeting in Paris in April; the High Level Ministerial Segment of the eleventh session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD11) in New York in April; the Kiev Environment for Europe Conference in May and the European Environment Councils in Brussels in March and June. She has also corresponded in writing and by telephone with US and EU colleagues on these issues. The WSSD highlighted the need for real change and action—this has remained her main focus.

The positive outcome of the CAP reform negotiations at the European Agriculture and Fisheries Council in Luxembourg in June will also play an important role in reducing environmental degradation and pursuing sustainable development objectives.

Other Defra Ministers have also discussed these issues with US and EU colleagues at, among others, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) 22nd Governing Council in Nairobi, the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit in February and the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto in March.

GM Crops

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the consultation on genetically modified crops. [126117]

Mr. Morley: The public debate on GM issues ('GM Nation?') is being managed by an independent steering board at arm's length from Government. The public phase of the debate was launched on 3 June and was followed by six regional launch events. Further local meetings have been organised throughout the UK by organisations and individuals, and the public were also able to participate via the interactive debate website. As of 11 July, over 17,000 feedback questionnaires had been received. The Steering Board is due to submit its report to Government in September.

The public debate is one strand of a wider GM dialogue announced by the Secretary of State last July, which also comprises a Science Review and a study by the Strategy Unit into the overall costs and benefits of GM crops. The Strategy Unit's report was published on 11 July; the report is available online at www.strategy.gov.uk and a copy has also been placed in the Library. The report of the science review was

published on 21 July. Both the Strategy Unit and the Science Review panel have invited comments on their reports. The Food Standards Agency also published its report on "Consumers views on GM food" on 16 July, which represents the FSA's contribution to the public debate.

Separately, we are expecting publication of the results of our Farm Scale Evaluation (FSE) crop trials this autumn, which will then be in the public domain, and people will be able to comment on them if they wish. The Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment, which will provide independent advice to Government on the implications of the FSE results, has decided to hold a special meeting in public to take evidence on the results from experts and stakeholders.

Before any GM crop can be cultivated in the EU, each member state has the opportunity to scrutinise the application for marketing consent for commercial cultivation. Applications are considered on a case-by-case basis under EC Directive 2001/18 on the deliberate release of Genetically Modified Organisms into the environment. The directive provides for mandatory public consultation on each application.

We will decide our policy on the commercial cultivation of GM crops based on an objective assessment of all the available information, including the reports of the three strands of the GM dialogue and the results of our Farm Scale Evaluation crop trials.

Greenfield Sites

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the implications for the Government's direction that brownfield or derelict land assets be used as a priority before greenfield sites of the High Court judgement by Mr. Justice Sullivan on 8July on the case brought by Laing Homes over a site near High Wycombe. [126732]

Alun Michael: The judgment in R (Laing Homes Ltd.) v Buckinghamshire County Council & the Secretary of State for the Environment Food & Rural Affairs (third party) (2003) concluded that village green rights could not be established in the particular circumstances of that case, because the land to be registered had been used to cultivate, and harvest, an annual hay crop.

The specific controls over development on village greens are separate from planning controls. Planning consent is required before land can be developed for housing. It remains Government policy that local planning authorities should provide sufficient housing land but give priority to re using previously-developed land within urban areas, bringing empty homes back into use and converting existing buildings, in preference to the development of greenfield sites.

Hazardous Waste

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will list the methods of treatment and their capacity that will be available from 16 July 2004 to treat hazardous waste containing *(a)* high levels of mercury, *(b)* high levels of arsenic, *(c)* high levels of nickel and *(d)* isocyanates before landfill; [126878]

(2) if she will list the methods of treatment, and their capacity, that will be available from 16 July 2004 to treat hazardous waste arising from the manufacture, formulation, supply and use of plastics and organic waste from paints and inks before landfill. [126883]

Mr. Morley: A range of possible treatment methods exist now and in the future to deal with hazardous waste. These range from high temperature incineration and solidification to landfill. Treatment standards for wastes with high levels of mercury, arsenic and nickel and containing isocyanate will form part of the waste acceptance criteria currently being developed and on which there will be a Government consultation shortly.

Similarly, hazardous waste arising from the manufacture, formulation, supply and use of plastics and organic waste from paints and inks will be subject to the requirements of the waste acceptance criteria before landfill. The nature and properties of the wastes and the requirements to meet the waste acceptance criteria influence the most appropriate treatment technique.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the hazardous waste landfill capacity that will be required from 16 July 2004. [126879]

Mr. Morley: In 2001, some 2.3 million tonnes of special waste was consigned to landfill in England and Wales, which represents some 45 per cent. of total special waste consigned.

Projections for future years are affected by a range of factors, including the likely increase in costs of treatment and disposal, and the impact of this change in costs on producers efforts to minimise waste. Changes to the hazardous waste list are likely to increase the amount of hazardous waste to be consigned. These and other factors are currently being investigated in support of work on possible scenarios for the hazardous waste forum, which is due to report in the autumn. The scenarios currently envisaged suggest a range for consignable hazardous waste of between 4.3 and 7.3 million tonnes per annum over the next five years. It is likely that the proportion of this waste being consigned to landfill will decrease markedly as costs of landfill disposal increase, and treatment requirements apply, making alternative treatments more economically attractive and in some cases necessary.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the permitted capacity is of landfill sites that will be classified as hazardous from 16 July 2004. [126880]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is not available centrally at the present time, but will be compiled by the Environment Agency from landfill permit applications received, and should be available in December..

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the amount of hazardous waste produced in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 2001 and *(d)* 2002; and what projections her Department has made of hazardous waste produced in (i) 2003, (ii) 2004, (iii) 2005 and (iv) 2006. [126881]

Mr. Morley: Data collected by the Environment Agency on the amount of special waste consigned per annum show that for England and Wales, the following amounts were consigned:

	Million tonnes
1999	4.9
2000	5.3
2001	5.3

Note:
Data for 2002 is not yet available.

Projections for future years are affected by a range of factors, including the likely increase in costs of treatment and disposal, and the impact of this change in costs on producers efforts to minimise waste. Changes to the hazardous waste list are likely to increase the amount of hazardous waste to be consigned. These and other factors are currently being investigated in support of work on possible scenarios for the hazardous waste forum, which is due to report in the autumn. The scenarios currently envisaged suggest a range for consignable hazardous waste of between 4.3 and 7.3 million tonnes per annum over the next five years.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to (1) what standards she will require hazardous waste arising from the manufacture, formulation, supply and use of plastics to be treated before landfill from 16 July 2004; and on what basis these standards have been set; [126872]

(2) to what standards she will require organic based waste from paints and inks to be treated before landfill from July 2004; and on what basis these standards have been set; [126873]

(3) to what standards she will require hazardous waste containing *(a)* high levels of mercury, *(b)* high levels of arsenic, *(c)* high levels of nickel and *(d)* icocynates to be treated before landfill from 16 July 2004; and on what basis these standards have been set. [126874]

Mr. Morley: Under the Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002, waste can only be accepted at landfill if it does not result in unacceptable emissions to groundwater, surface water, or the surrounding environment, jeopardise environment protection measures, put at risk waste stabilisation measures at the landfill or endanger human health. As from July 2004, all hazardous waste as defined in the Regulations will require treatment prior to landfill. This requirement will extend to non-hazardous waste on a date yet to be specified.

When the Council Decision on Waste Acceptance Criteria is implemented, for waste to be accepted in hazardous waste landfills, separate cells in non hazardous waste landfills or in inert waste landfills, it must meet the criteria set out in the Decision. These criteria include limit values for chemical and other contaminants and for organic content. These values were drawn up by an EU Commission scientific modelling group, chaired by a scientist from the Environment Agency.

We will be consulting shortly on the implementing of the Council Decision on Waste Acceptance Criteria in England and Wales. Overall, the Government is committed to reducing the UK's reliance on landfill, which makes little practical use of waste and is a missed opportunity to recover value from waste.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what environmental assessment she has made of not requiring hazardous waste arising from the manufacture, formulation, supply and use of plastics to be treated before landfill from 16 July 2004; [126875]

(2) what environmental assessment she has made of not requiring hazardous waste containing *(a)* high levels of mercury, *(b)* high levels of arsenic, *(c)* high levels of nickel and *(d)* icocynates to be treated before landfill from 16 July 2004. [126882]

Mr. Morley: Under the Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002, that implemented the technical and regulatory components of the Landfill Directive, all hazardous waste as defined in the Regulations will require treatment prior to landfill from July 2004.

The only exception is waste for which such treatment does not contribute to the objectives of the Directive by reducing the quantity or the hazards to human health or the environment.

Overall, the Government is committed to reducing the UK's reliance on landfill, which makes little practical use of waste and is a missed opportunity to recover value from waste.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many tonnes of *(a)* municipal, *(b)* commercial, *(c)* industrial and *(d)* other waste was sent to exempt landfill sites in each year since 1997. [126876]

Mr. Morley: None; no general rules have been made under Article 11(1)(a) of the Waste Framework Directive which would enable a landfill site to operate under the terms of an exemption from waste management licensing. The derogation in the Landfill Directive for landfills serving islands and isolated settlements was not taken up for England because no existing sites met the criteria and any future site in these locations should meet the full requirements of the Directive.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by her Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if she will make a statement. [126197]

Alun Michael: Defra was established as a new Department in 2001. Since that time, one outsourced contract has been signed with LogicaCMG for the replacement and support of the Radioactive Incident Monitoring System (RIMNET 3) until 2012 to the value of £16.1 million.

The information provided relates to the core Department only since its creation.

Johannesburg Summit

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress her Department has made in meeting the outcomes of the Earth Summit in Johannesburg. [126360]

Mr. Morley: The Department leads on a number of the commitments made at last year's World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)—international biodiversity, chemicals management, marine issues, fisheries, agriculture, and sustainable consumption and production patterns. The full set of main commitments was set out in the Government's Memorandum to the Environmental Audit Committee in February 2003, copies of which are in the House Library. We will be presenting an overview of progress across Government to mark the anniversary of WSSD. In the meantime, a summary list of progress against the commitments on which Defra leads is attached to the paper on WSSD follow-up, tabled at the 14 July 2003 meeting of the Sustainable Development Task Force. This document is available at: http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/sd_strategy/taskforce/index.htm

Landfill

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of landfill sites will be full by 2010; and what alternative methods of disposal will be used once waste landfill sites are filled. [125573]

Mr. Morley: The Government is committed to reducing the UK's reliance on landfill, which makes little practical use of waste and is a missed opportunity to recover value from waste. The landfilling of waste sits at the bottom of the waste hierarchy and in Waste Strategy 2000 and its subsequent response to the Strategy Unit Report "Waste Not Want Not" Government has set out a range of policies to promote the reduction, re-use, recycling and recovery of waste in order to divert it from landfill. The demand for landfill in 2010 and the availability of landfill sites to deal with that demand is therefore impossible to predict, although the impact of Government policies, including the targets in the proposed Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme should result in lower demand.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of which landfill sites in England are in need of remedial measures to combat the effects of pollution; how much this will cost; who will pay; what steps have been taken to prevent future problems of this kind; and if she will make a statement. [126169]

Mr. Morley: Until recently, landfill sites were licensed under the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994. Under this system, the Environment Agency is obliged to ensure that, when issuing a waste management licence, the activities to which the licence relate do not cause pollution of the environment, harm to health or serious detriment to the amenities of the locality. The Agency is also obliged to modify the conditions of the licence if it appears that these impacts could be caused by the continuation of the landfill activities. If remedial measures are needed, it is for the licence holder to cover the cost of these, and the cost will vary depending on the nature of the works needed. No national figures have been collated on the actual numbers of landfills where modifications specifically to tackle pollution have taken place.

The Landfill Directive introduced stringent new standards for landfill sites to protect the environment. The Environment Agency has begun re-permitting all landfill sites under the Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002. The programme is expected to be completed by March 2007. As part of this process, all operational sites needed to submit a Conditioning Plan to the Agency by July 2002 which gave an outline of the measures that need to be taken by each site to meet the new standards. These plans are available on the Agency's public register.

The Government assessed the cost of meeting the Landfill Directive in a Regulatory Impact Assessment. We estimated that the Directive brought forward a number of requirements that will add between £2.20 and £4.40 per tonne to the mean cost of waste disposal, with costs ranging from £0 to £120 per tonne for specific waste streams. These costs will largely be passed back to the waste producers, reflecting the polluter pays principle, and will provide a further incentive to waste producers to reuse, recycling or otherwise minimise their waste production.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the remaining capacity of landfill sites in the UK. [126770]

Mr. Morley: This Department has not conducted an exercise to determine the remaining capacity of landfill sites. The information that is available on the number of landfill sites in England and Wales comes from the conditioning plan exercise carried out by the Environment Agency. The number of landfill sites that will remain operational after July 2002 and after 2004, broken down by classification (hazardous, non-hazardous and inert) and by region, is as follows:

Region	*Non-hazardous*	*Inert*	*Hazardous (post 2002)*	*Hazardous (post 2004)*
Anglian	43	60	47	9
Midlands	50	74	42	4
North East	89	58	39	11
North West	49	37	27	8
South West	39	46	16	1
Southern	30	35	13	1
Thames	31	49	19	0
Wales	23	30	15	3
Total	311	329	218	37

Milk Quotas

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what action her Department will take to ensure the implementation of the Thomsen ruling on non-producing milk quota holders in respect of *(a)* existing tenant farmers who are non-producing milk quota holders, *(b)* non-tenant farmers who are non-producing milk quota holders and *(c)* tenant farmers who are non-producing milk quota holders but who cannot sell because they are in dispute

with their landlord over the apportionment of its value; and if she will make a statement on the effect of the ruling on each of the groups listed; [126227]

(2) what assessment she has made, following the outcome of the Thomsen judgment, of cases where landlords refuse to give permission to their tenant farmers who seek to sell their non-producing milk quota; and what action her Department can take in such cases. [126225]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* As a result of the Thomsen European Court of Justice (ECJ) judgment, quota holders, irrespective of status, who are no longer in active milk production will, by 31 March 2004, have to sell their milk quota, resume production, or otherwise have their quota confiscated. Where quota is confiscated, under the current UK legislation the quota holder has six years in which to resume production and thus have the quota restored. The new European Council quotas regulation, which is still under negotiation, provides for this period to be reduced to two years. Currently, only the quota holder may apply for restoration of quota but we are considering amending UK legislation to allow anyone with an interest in the holding/quota to apply.

Although representations have been made to the Department with regard to landlord/tenant issues in the light of the Thomsen judgment, it is not for Defra to intervene in cases where private tenancy agreements give rise to quota disputes between landlords and their tenants.

Janet Hughes

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what regard she had to the Lord Chancellor's guidelines in relation to ability to pay in taking the decision to pursue costs from Ms Janet Hughes. [125394]

Margaret Beckett: A person's ability to pay an order for costs is a factor which Defra takes into account in all cases. In Janet Hughes' case this was why Defra:

(a) wrote to her on three occasions before taking enforcement action asking her to put forward payment proposals, which she refused to do;

(b) has suspended enforcement action in order to try to reach an agreement which is acceptable to both parties;

(c) has repeatedly stated in correspondence that it would like to resolve this matter by agreement, and that it is prepared to set payments at a realistic level.

Non-native Species

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department will *(a)* issue a response and *(b)* launch a public consultation in response to the Department's Review of Non-Native Species published in March on its recommendations for dealing with invasive non-native species; and if she will make a statement. [126250]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him on 12 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 1011W. The Department would expect the Government response to be available in September, with public consultation following shortly after.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to consult local, county and regional government and other non-statutory landowners on the recommendations of her Department's Review of Non-Native Species and the Government response to its recommendations for dealing with invasive non-native species, with particular reference to *(a)* their responsibility for habitats where invasive non-native weeds are growing and *(b)* their responsibilities in controlling these weeds; what discussions she had had with these bodies on the subject; and if she will make a statement. [126251]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Department will consult widely on the Government's response to the review's recommendations. A wide range of stakeholders were directly involved in the Department's review, including organisations such as the Local Government Association, the National Farmers Union and the Country and Land Business Association. The review made a number of key recommendations.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions her Department is having on providing financial assistance to local government and non-statutory bodies with responsibilities for habitats where invasive non-native weeds are present to assist them in tackling and eradicating these weeds; and if she will make a statement. [126252]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him on 12 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 1011W.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs under what circumstances a local authority may become involved with a control project to deal with invasive non-native plants; how a local authority may apply to be involved in such a project; what criteria she sets for such control projects; and if she will make a statement. [126253]

Mr. Bradshaw: Local authorities may embark on their own programmes of control of invasive non-native plants. For example, a consortium led by Cornwall county council is undertaking a four year project researching the biological control of Japanese knotweed. This Department was approached and agreed to join the consortium and assist with funding the research. Guidance on control and disposal is provided by English Nature and the Environment Agency.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from local, county and regional government, and non-statutory landowners regarding the *(a)* costs and *(b)* difficulties in controlling invasive non-native weeds on land under their custody; and if she will make a statement. [126254]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Department regularly receives representations, on the telephone and in writing, from officers of local and county authorities and from individual landowners relating to invasive non-native weeds. These cover a variety of issues. No central record is kept of telephone calls.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list *(a)* the names, titles and grades of the officials who sit on the EU advisory committee on the transportation of radioactive waste (surveillance and control), *(b)* the number of times, and the dates, on which it has met since January 2002, *(c)* the agenda items it has considered since January 2002, *(d)* the decisions it has made since January 2002 and *(e)* the means used to communicate the decisions to the House. [110295]

Mr. Morley: I assume the hon. Member is referring to the advisory Committee established under Article 19 of European Council Directive 92/3/EURATOM on the supervision and control of shipments of radioactive waste between member states and into and out of the Community. This Committee does not have a fixed membership, but consists of delegates drawn from each of the 15 European member states. The Committee meets on an ad-hoc basis and has met once since January 2002, on 18 October 2002, to consider possible amendments to the Directive suggested by a European Commission working group on simpler legislation in the internal market. The Commission took note of the views of the Committee and is expected to bring forward further proposals in due course.

Packaging Regulations

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to include pallets within the terms of the packaging regulations. [126915]

Mr. Morley: Pallets are already covered by the terms of the packaging regulations.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to review the workings of the packaging regulations; and what measures she is planning to ensure that the price of packaging recovery notes does not fall below a level at which the mechanisms of the packaging regulations cease to operate effectively. [126916]

Mr. Morley: We will be publishing a consultation paper later this month seeking views on possible amendments to the packaging regulations. Targets for the recovery and recycling of packaging waste from 2004 to 2008 and a range of other measures designed to improve the system are considered in the consultation document. A number of these changes have been recommended by the Advisory Committee on Packaging who have reviewed a number of aspects of the packaging regulations. We believe that the changes proposed would ensure the continued viability of the present system of packaging recovery notes and would contribute to a more efficient and effective, system.

Pesticides

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of a voluntary approach to pesticide reduction in agriculture. [126690]

Alun Michael: Provided that the Voluntary Initiative is fully implemented, the Government believes that it will be effective in reducing the environmental impact of pesticides. Progress with the Voluntary Initiative is kept under close scrutiny. In drawing up the planned national pesticides strategy, the Government will consider whether a policy of targeted use reduction might help achieve the overall aim of impact reduction.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she takes to ensure that the activities of the Pesticides Safety Directorate are consistent with the Food Standards Agency in relation to the pesticide reduction strategy. [126691]

Alun Michael: Both the Food Standards Agency and the Pesticides Safety Directorate are fully in support of the regulatory system for pesticides, which aims to ensure that pesticides do not pose unacceptable risks to people or to the environment when used according to statutory conditions. In addition, the Pesticides Safety Directorate has a policy to encourage practices that further reduce the risks that pesticide use poses to the environment. The Food Standards Agency has a policy of encouraging reductions in residue levels of food below statutory levels.

Both bodies are aware of the need to work together to ensure that these complementary policies work well together in practice. They are working closely together on these and other issues.

Poultry Meat

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what tonnage of poultry meat was imported in the last 12 months. [126238]

Mr. Bradshaw: The following table shows UK imports of poultry meat and poultry meat products for all months in 2002 and 2003 for which data are available.

Thousand tonnes

Year/month	*Poultry carcase meat: fresh, chilled or frozen*	*Poultry meat and offal preparations: prepared or preserved*	*Poultry offal*
2002			
January	24	8	0
February	25	9	0
March	26	10	0
April	25	9	0
May	28	9	0
June	24	9	0
July	26	11	0
August	26	9	0
September	29	11	0
October	28	11	0
November	26	8	0
December	28	10	0
2002 total	314	113	2
2003			
January	25	11	0
February	24	11	0
March	25	10	0
April	22	9	0
2003 total	96	40	1

Notes:
1. Data prepared by Statistics (Commodities and Food) Accounts and Trade, ESD, DEFRA.
2. Data are provisional and subject to amendment.
Source:
HM Customs and Excise.

Radioactivity

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Department's role in the monitoring of releases of radioactivity. [126359]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency, which is a non-departmental public body sponsored by Defra, authorises releases of radioactivity to the environment from nuclear licensed sites and non-nuclear premises in England and Wales. Authorisations specify limits on the amounts of radioactivity that may be discharged. The Environment Agency requires nuclear site operators to carry out monitoring of their own discharges and of the environment in the vicinity of their sites, to demonstrate the effectiveness of these controls.

The Environment Agency also commissions independent check sampling of authorised discharges and conducts a comprehensive programme to monitor radioactivity in the environment resulting from such discharges. Results have been published annually by the Environment Agency in its report "Radioactivity in the Environment", copies of which are in the Library. From 2003, the results will be published in "Radioactivity in Food and the Environment" (RIFE), which will be a joint publication between the Environment Agency, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Department of Environment, Northern Ireland and the Food Standards Agency.

Defra co-ordinates the monitoring of radioactivity in air, rainwater and drinking water at locations throughout the UK and submits the results to the European Commission in compliance with Articles 35 and 36 of the Euratom Treaty. The results are included in "Radioactivity in the Environment" and will be included in RIFE from 2003. The Food Standards Agency carries out its own extensive programme of monitoring radioactivity, to ensure that discharges do not adversely affect food safety, and it submits data to the Commission on radioactivity in dairy milk and a typical mixed diet. The Food Standards Agency and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency have jointly published their monitoring results annually in RIFE, copies of which are in the Library.

Defra is also responsible for operation and maintenance of the Radioactive Incident Monitoring Network (RIMNET) which is designed to detect radioactivity released as a result of an accident outside the UK. RIMNET continuously monitors gamma radiation at 93 locations throughout the UK and raises an alert if pre-set levels are exceeded.

The great majority of radioactivity in the environment arises from natural sources, such as the release of radon gas from the ground. Radon can accumulate in buildings and may contaminate private water supplies in some areas of the UK. Defra conducts an ongoing measurement programme of radon in homes and has carried out research in partnership with West Devon borough council into the levels of radon in drinking water from private boreholes and wells.

Recycling

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the likelihood of achieving a household recycling rate of 25 per cent. by 2005. [125040]

Mr. Morley: The provisional estimates from the Department's "Municipal Waste Management Survey" for 2001–02 show that 12.4 per cent. of household waste in England was recycled or composted in that year. We are planning to meet our targets for 2005.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set *(a)* national and *(b)* local statutory targets for waste minimisation; and if she will make a statement. [125122]

Mr. Morley: The Strategy Unit in its Report, "Waste Not Want Not", recommended that Defra in conjunction with ODPM and others should develop proposals for alternative indicators that incorporate success in reducing waste volumes—for example, new combined minimisation and recycling targets for local authorities.

In its response, published on 6 May 2003, it recognised that progress must be made towards reducing waste. However, before considering whether to set waste reduction targets for local authorities, the Government will consider what levers local authorities have for reducing waste and whether, in fact, a reduction target is an effective means of encouraging waste reduction.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will raise the national targets for recycling of household waste to *(a)* 35 per cent. by 2010 and *(b)* 45 per cent. by 2015; and if she will make a statement. [125123]

Mr. Morley: In Waste Strategy 2000 the Government set a target of recycling or composting at least 30 per cent. of household waste by 2010 and 33 per cent. by 2015. The Strategy Unit report, "Waste Not Want Not", published in November 2002, recommended higher national recycling targets of 35 per cent. by 2010 and 45 per cent. by 2015. We recognise that national recycling rates higher than the current targets are both possible and desirable. The Government response to the Strategy Unit report commits us to reviewing the national recycling targets in the light of progress made by local authorities in meeting their 2003–04 targets.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which materials will be included in the review of a ban on the landfilling of recyclable products due to be carried out in 2006. [125125]

Mr. Morley: There is currently no ban on landfilling of recyclable materials and no review of a ban is due to be carried out in 2006. However, the Strategy Unit's Report, "Waste Not, Want Not", recommended that Defra and DTI should review the case for a ban on the

landfilling of recyclable products in 2006–07, and at the same time, consider the case for a similar ban on incinerating recyclable products.

In their response to the Report, the Government said they would like to see increased utilisation of valuable resources which are currently wasted but many materials will only be recycled if there is demand for them. Developing sustainable markets for recyclable materials is, therefore, an important prerequisite to a ban—the Government do not want to create a new problem by requiring the long-term storage of recyclable materials for which markets have not been developed. The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) was created to help develop these markets and the Government will continue to support WRAP'S role in market development. It would be preferable to avoid bans until other, more flexible, options have been exhausted.

However, the Government will review progress in market development and recycling rates in 2006–07, and reconsider the case for banning disposal of recyclable products or materials then. The Strategy Unit has specifically mentioned a ban on biodegradable material if the other instruments designed to meet Article 5 of the Landfill Directive are failing to make progress. The system of tradable landfill allowances being set up under the Waste and Emissions Trading Bill will progressively reduce the amount of biodegradable municipal waste being disposed of to landfill.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on Government waste minimisation programmes to *(a)* increase the number of households that practise composting, *(b)* promote reusable nappies, *(c)* promote a reduction of waste from supermarket purchased products and *(d)* create an innovation fund to develop innovative ways to deal with waste. [125129]

Mr. Morley: In accordance with the recommendations of the Strategy Unit, the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) will be taking forward a number of waste minimisation activities as part of Defra's new Waste Implementation Programme (WIP). These include a targeted national home composting programme to promote best practice and partnership working among local authorities, the development of a re-useable nappy service with a programme of support for SMEs, a major retailer initiative working with the top five supermarket chains and a waste innovation fund to provide resources to support innovation by retailers and others in areas such as minimising material used in consumer products. The budget to deliver these measures is £8 million in 2003–04.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the objectives of the Recycling and Organics Technical Advisory Team are; who the members of the team are; how they were selected; and if she will make a statement. [125130]

Mr. Morley: In accordance with the recommendations of the Strategy Unit, the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) will be taking forward a kerbside recycling best practice programme. This programme will include the development of a Recycling and Organics Technical Advisory Team (ROTATE) whose objective will be to provide a national centre of excellence available as an advisory service to local authorities needing to implement and improve kerbside recycling, with some emphasis on organics collection systems and complementary support on Civic Amenity and bring site development.

The ROTATE team will be made up of a combination of in-house staff at WRAP and specialist external advisors. Staff recruitment is currently under way for the ROTATE Team Manager, and specialist advisers will be appointed through a competitive process, drawing on a range of appropriate expertise from the United Kingdom and overseas.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what role the Government will have in setting measurable targets for increasing public awareness and participation in recycling and waste minimisation activities which the Waste Resources Action Programme is undertaking as part of the Waste Awareness Programme; and if she will make a statement. [125131]

Mr. Morley: Defra will work closely with the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to define a number of output measures against which the progress of the education and awareness programme will be measured.

There are two elements to target setting for the WRAP'S education arid awareness programme. First, the setting of targets related to the national awareness programme and second, targets for raised awareness and improved participation in kerbside schemes related to support for local authority programmes.

A detailed review is being conducted by WRAP on target setting as part of an intensive first period of investigation and planning. WRAP will also call on a number of recent examples of good practice in communication campaigns that could assist in informing target setting, such as the work conducted by Rethink Rubbish in various local authorities across England.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on Government plans to promote the implementation of waste management technologies as an alternative to landfill. [125132]

Mr. Morley: In accordance with the recommendations of the Strategy Unit, Defra will be taking forward a new technologies workstream as a part of the new Waste Implementation Programme.

This workstream will deliver a number of objectives to overcome barriers to the successful development and take-up of alternative waste management technologies which reduce the environmental impact of waste disposal in England.

This workstream will consist of four programmes of activity: a Waste Research and Innovation Programme, for research and development into new technologies; a Demonstrator Programme to help establish new commercially viable waste treatment technologies; a

Waste Technology Support Programme, a programme of impartial advice and support to local authorities and the waste management industry; and a Waste Technology Data Centre, to be managed by the Environment Agency.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much investment through PFI there has been in waste projects since the establishment of the Waste PFI Delivery Plan; and how much future investment in waste projects the Government estimate can be achieved through PFI projects. [125133]

Mr. Morley: The table sets out the level of funding that has been approved for waste PFI projects.

Local authority	*Date approved at outline stage*	*Date approved at final stage*	*Amount of PFI credits (£)*
Central Berkshire	August 2002	n/a	37
Cornwall	May 2003	n/a	25
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	October 1999	March 2003	49
ELWA	October 2000	January 2003	47
Gloucestershire	January 2003	n/a	25.105
Hereford and Worcester	February 1998	—	57
Isle of Wight	n/a	October 1997	13
Kirklees	n/a	March 1998	33.9
Leicester	July 2000	May 2003	30.841
South Gloucestershire	August 1998	July 1999	33.3
Surrey	June 1998	June 1999	85.5
West Berkshire	May 2003	n/a	23.74
West Sussex	August 2002	n/a	25

Spending Review 2002 allocated £355 million for waste PFI projects for the three years of that review period (£100 million in 2003–04, £125 million in 2004–05 and £130 million in 2005–06). The forthcoming Spending Review 2004 will include a view on the need for PFI resources in the three future years that are addressed by that review.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will allocate additional resources to waste policy; and if she will make a statement. [125134]

Mr. Morley: Additional resources have been allocated for additional staff to deliver the recommendations in the Strategy Unit report, "Waste Not Want Not" and for policy development.

Defra has established a new 'Waste Implementation Programme' team to take forward the recommendations of the Strategy Unit. Consistent with the Strategy Unit's recommendations and the requirements of the Landfill Directive, the team's focus will be municipal waste.

The Waste Implementation Programme will run a Sustainable Waste Management Programme for England comprising around £84 million in 2003–04 and £92 million for the years 2004–05 and 2005–06.

Along with these new measures, the Government has confirmed that £1.5 million will be made available for administrative resource in Defra to implement waste delivery. Recruitment for additional posts is under way.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding her Department has provided for the Waste Resources Action Programme in each year since its inception; and what its projected funding is. [125135]

Mr. Morley: Defra has provided the following funding (rounded to the nearest thousand) for each year of the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) since its inception:

	£000
2001–02	6,326,000
2002–03	10,473,000
2003–04	36,015,000
Total	52,814,000

WRAP will also be receiving funding from Defra for its contribution to delivering some of the workstreams under the Waste Implementation Programme.

The Department of Trade and Industry and the Devolved Administrations also fund WRAP.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who the members are of the steering board set up to provide leadership and advice to the sustainable waste delivery programme; and what the process was by which they were appointed. [125136]

Mr. Morley: In accordance with the recommendations of the Strategy Unit, Defra has established a Steering Group to drive delivery of Defra's Waste Implementation Programme.

David Varney, chairman of mmO2, will chair the group, which will comprise the following independent members who were appointed on the basis of their expertise and interest in the key areas of the programme, and their skills and experience in delivery.

Lynton Barker—Hedra;

Vie Cocker—WRAP;

Dan Corry—New Local Government Network;

Fiona Driscoll—Prime Minister's Delivery Unit;

Sir John Harman—Environment Agency;

Maxine Holdsworth—National Consumer Council;

Andy Moore—Community Recycling Network;

David North—Tesco;

David Riddle—Environmental Services Association;

John Schultz—Stockport Council;

Gordon Shields—Shields Environmental Plc;

Bill Stow—Defra; and

Cllr Kay Twitchen—Essex county council, currently chair of Local Government Association Waste Executive.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the Government will introduce penalties for local authorities which fail to meet the Government's statutory targets for recycling. [125137]

Mr. Morley: The Government's statutory targets for recycling have been set under the Best Value regime. The Secretary of State has powers under section 15 of the Local Government Act 1999 to act where local authorities are failing to deliver best value. The way in which these powers

would be used in support of Statutory Performance Standards for recycling and composting of household waste is set out in Annex A of "Guidance on Municipal Waste Management Strategies" (DETR March 2001), which can be found on Defra's website at: http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/management/guidance/mwms/10.htm or in the Library of the House. The protocol to which Annex A refers has been agreed with the Local Government Association setting out the principles under which these powers will be used, and has been revised recently.

The Government have made it clear that they will work with local authorities to ensure that such failures are minimised, and that intervention will be the exception. The powers would be used predominantly to achieve improvements in service delivery, as opposed to tackling procedural failures. The nature and severity of the intervention will vary, and need to reflect several factors such as the amount by which the standard is missed, the steps a local authority had taken to achieve the standard, external factors such as problems with a market for a particular material, or unusual occurrences such as the recent fuel crisis and the likelihood of the local authority meeting the standard in the immediate future. If there was evidence to suggest that a local authority was not taking the right sort of steps in respect of its waste management duties generally, or its recycling standards in particular, then Ministers have made clear that they will take that very seriously.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much *(a)* household and *(b)* commercial waste was recycled in Shrewsbury and Atcham in each year since 1997, broken down by materials. [125626]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 14 July 2003]:* Figures in tonnes relating to household waste from the Municipal Waste Management Survey returns for Shrewsbury and Atcham since 1997 are as follows:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Glass	676	870	949	996	1,076
Paper and Card	2,001	2,591	2,499	2,556	2,649
Cans (mixed)	35	39	57	72	69
Textiles	25	36	38	57	60
Scrap metal and white goods	40	19	—	65	—
Compostable waste	—	—	—	48	50
Books	—	—	—	6	—
Total	2,777	3,555	3,543	3,800	3,904

These data cover Shrewsbury and Atcham Waste Collection Authority. An unknown proportion of waste from households in the area would have been recycled at Civic Amenity sites. However, the Civic Amenity site data are provided by the Waste Disposal Authority (in this case Shropshire) and would cover all WCAs within its boundaries.

No data are available on the proportion of commercial waste recycled within the area.

Ritual Slaughter

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about her policy on shechita and halal meat. [125938]

Mr. Bradshaw: The slaughter of animals without prior stunning to provide meat for Jews and Muslims is currently permitted in this country. The Farm Animal Welfare Council (the Government's independent advisory body on issues related to farm animal welfare) has recently issued a report on the welfare of red meat animals at slaughter. The report includes a recommendation that slaughter without prior stunning should be banned in this country. The report also contains a further 93 recommendations and we will be responding to the report after we have considered the recommendations and consulted interested parties. Whatever decision is reached on the recommendation to ban slaughter without prior stunning the import of shechita and halal meat will continue to be permitted.

Rural Enterprise Scheme

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the members of the Rural Enterprise Scheme's South West Regional Appraisal Panel. [126152]

Alun Michael: The South West Regional Appraisal Panel comprises three members:

David Sisson: Regional Manager, Rural Development Service (RDS), South West and Chairman,

Malcolm Chalmers: Project Based Schemes Manager, RDS, for the South West

Steve Bone: Senior Rural Development Adviser, Government Office South West.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what efforts are made to encourage schools to involve their pupils in the sustainable development of the community through *(a)* local agenda 21 and *(b)* other schemes. [126312]

Mr. Morley: The information is as follows:

(a) The Local Government Act 2000 placed a duty on local authorities to prepare community strategies to promote the economic, social and environmental well being of their communities and contribute to sustainable development in the UK. We believe that sustainable development can most effectively become a mainstream issue for communities if local authorities build upon their partnership working and community engagement and subsume their LA21 strategies within their community strategies. We expect them to include children and young people in this process.

(b) Education for Sustainable Development is a statutory part of Science, Geography, Design and Technology and Citizenship within the National Curriculum. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has provided on-line guidance for teachers.

Sustainable Waste

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the local authority support nerve centre and funding teams initiated to help local authorities deliver sustainable waste management will provide regular reports on their activities and progress. [125940]

Mr. Morley: Both the Defra local authority support and local authority funding workstreams will be required to provide regular reports to the Waste Implementation Steering Group via the Programme Director. In addition, progress will be reported to the Defra management board via the Senior Responsible Officer for the programme, also within Defra.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the appointment process for the local authority support nerve centre and funding teams initiated to help local authorities deliver sustainable waste management; and what the *(a)* names and *(b)* relevant experience are of those who have been appointed. [125953]

Mr. Morley: Both the local authority support and local authority funding teams are being appointed following a detailed skills assessment, in accordance normal recruitment procedures for Defra staff.

Timber

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the implementation of the Government's policy on using sustainable timber in public building projects. [126741]

Mr. Morley: Departments report their performance on timber procurement in the annual Sustainable Development in Government reports that replaced the Greening Government reports. The report published last November shows a gradual improvement in performance. The report can be found at: http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/sdig/reports/ar2002/index.htm.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to establish a central point of expertise on timber to help implement Government timber procurement policy; and if she will make a statement. [126011]

Mr. Morley: The Government will create a central point of expertise on timber procurement (CPET) to help public sector buyers specify their requirements with more clarity and assess the credibility of supplier's claims for the sources of their timber. The CPET is planned to begin work later this year.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether her Department receives notification of proposals for transferring ships which *(a)* might contain toxic materials and *(b)* have been used for the transfer of toxic materials from outside the UK to yards within the UK to be broken up; and what recent reports she has received on such proposals. [125802]

Mr. Morley: The competent authority in England and Wales for transboundary movements of waste, including waste ships, is the Environment Agency. As required under Council Regulation (EEC) No.259/93[1] any shipment of hazardous waste must be notified to the Environment Agency, and their consent to the shipment obtained before the waste shipment begins.

If waste ships either contain or have been contaminated by hazardous waste, they would be subject to the highest levels of scrutiny and controls under the regulation above.

The Environment Agency has informed my officials that they have received a notification from the United States regarding a possible transboundary movement of waste ships for recovery.

[1] Regulation (EEC) No.259/93 on the supervision and control of shipments of waste within, into and out of the European Community.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Governments of *(a)* the Republic of Ireland, *(b)* Iceland and *(c)* the Faroes regarding proposals to bring ships formerly used for transfer of toxic substances uncrewed to the United Kingdom to be broken up. [125804]

Mr. Morley: I have had no discussions with the Republic of Ireland, Iceland or the Faroes regarding a proposal to import waste ships to the United Kingdom for recovery.

The Environment Agency has received a notification regarding the import of waste ships from the US to the United Kingdom for the recovery of metals. Any such shipment would be subject to the comprehensive controls provided for by European and UK legislation[1].

Before giving consent to any proposed import of waste, the Environment Agency will have considered whether the proposed import is for genuine recovery, and that the recovery process will take place in properly authorised and appropriate facilities, including the treatment of hazardous residues. If any waste en-route between the US and UK were to transit the Republic of Ireland, Iceland or the Faroes, (such as by entry to a port) then the competent authorities concerned would also need to consent to the waste shipment.

[1] Regulation (EEC) No.259/93 on the supervision and control of shipments of waste within, into and out of the European Community.UK Management Plan for Exports and Imports of Waste.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what arrangements have been put in place for the disposal of toxic waste produced during the break up of ships brought from the United States to the UK to be broken up; and whether such waste products will be returned to the United States. [125805]

Mr. Morley: Hazardous residues from the recovery of any proposed import of waste would be landfilled or incinerated as appropriate. The disposal of residues is a matter of consideration for the Environment Agency in examining any proposal to import waste for recovery. Before the import can be approved, the Environment Agency as competent authority for the relevant waste shipments legislation[1] will have to be satisfied that residues can be disposed of in an environmentally sound manner.

UK and EC law does not allow the export of waste for disposal. Residues could be returned to the United States if they were subject to a recovery operation.

[1] Regulation (EEC) No. 259/93 on the supervision and control of shipments of waste within, into and out of the European Community, Article 14. United Kingdom Management Plan for Exports and Imports of Waste. P17

Warm Front

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research she has commissioned into the effect that the Warm Front Team has had in combating fuel poverty; and if she will make a statement. [126168]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Department recognises the importance of assessing the effect of Warm Front in tackling fuel poverty. A recent NAO report on Warm Front and a policy review undertaken by Defra looked at the targeting and delivering of the scheme now and for the next phase post 2005. A number of independent studies are looking at the impact of Warm Front in combating fuel poverty. The Department will be considering the findings of these studies in the coming months and assessing what further work may be required.

Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what statutory responsibility will be placed on local authorities to implement the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive. [126019]

Mr. Morley: The EU Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive does not place direct responsibilities on local authorities. The Government are preparing UK implementation of the directive and is discussing with local authorities how best to involve them in maximising use of the existing waste collection infrastructure so as to enable producers and retailers to meet their obligations under the directive.

Waste Management

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much hazardous waste was sent to landfills in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 2001 and *(d)* 2002; and what predictions have been made by (i) the Department and (ii) the Environment Agency on the quantities of hazardous waste that will be sent in (A) 2005, (B) 2006, (C) 2007, (D) 2008 and (E) 2009 to landfill sites that will be classified as hazardous from 16 July 2004. [124723]

Mr. Morley: The amount of hazardous wastes that have been disposed of in landfill in England and Wales for the years listed are as follows:

Year of disposal	*Special waste to landfill (thousand tonnes)*
1998–99[1]	2,342
2000	2,054
2001	2,332
2002	n/a

[1] Financial year

Data for 2002 are not yet available.

The amount of hazardous waste sent to landfill in future years is affected by a number of factors, and it is difficult to predict the relative impact of these factors with any accuracy. The factors include the clear likelihood that the number of hazardous waste landfills after July 2004 will reduce significantly as a result of requirements in the Landfill Directive. The directive requirements, including the ending of co-disposal in July 2004, the requirements of the waste acceptance criteria, and the need for pre-treatment before wastes are landfilled will also increase the cost of disposal of hazardous waste, which in turn is likely to provide a greater incentive for the reduction of the amount and hazardousness of waste at source. Set against these factors are the impacts of changes to the European hazardous waste list adopted in January 2002 which introduce a number of new waste streams as hazardous.

The Government have established a Hazardous Waste Forum for all relevant stakeholders to discuss these issues and those relating to the provision of treatment capacity for hazardous waste. To that end, the forum has established two sub groups to urgently consider (i) the effects of changes in legislation on producers, the scope for further waste prevention and minimisation and the consequent effect on hazardous waste arisings, and, (ii) treatment options and capacity. A third sub-group will build on this work to produce an advisory document in the autumn.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Environment Agency have taken to establish that financial provision as required by Articles 8 and 10 of the Landfill Directive will be available for all landfill sites that receive a Planning and Pollution Control Permit; [124724]

(2) what estimates *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Environment Agency have made of the cost of implementing Articles 8 and 10 of the Landfill Directive; [124725]

(3) what meetings she has had with representatives of the waste management industry to discuss Articles 8 and 10 of the Landfill Directive; [124726]

(4) when her Department will implement Articles 8 and 10 of the Landfill Directive. [124727]

Mr. Morley: The technical and regulatory requirements of the Landfill Directive, including the provisions of Articles 8 and 10, were implemented by the Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002. Ensuring that financial provision is available is a requirement on the landfill operator. The Environment Agency sets out a range of mechanisms that it considers to be adequate to meet the financial provisions requirement in its Waste Management Licensing Financial Provision Manual. Landfill operators due to be re-permitted under the terms of the Landfill Directive were informed of this position in November 2002.

Discussions are taking place between the Government, the Environment Agency and the industry about how the requirement of Article 8 of the directive might best be satisfied given the various aims of the Landfill Directive and the particular need to ensure appropriate safeguards against insolvent operators are

in place. We have not yet made an assessment of the costs as this is dependent on the outcome of these discussions.

In the meantime, the Environment Agency did commission work on the long-term liability that landfills pose to England and Wales. Part of this work, carried out by AEA Netcen, calculated that the net present value of landfill liabilities (ie the closure and aftercare costs of completed landfills) up to 2020 would be between £3-£3.5 billion.

Article 10 of the directive is concerned with passing on the full costs of landfill to waste producers. To meet this, the regulations place a requirement on the operator of a landfill. This makes it a condition of the permit issued for the landfill, that the charges the operator makes for the disposal of waste at the landfill covers a number of aspects. These include the setting up and operating of the landfill, the costs of the financial provision and the estimated cost for the closure and aftercare of the landfill for a period of at least 30 years from its closure. Passing the full cost to the waste producer upholds the 'polluter pays' principle.

Officials have met the industry at regular intervals to discuss these and other issues and will continue to do so. I met the Chief Executive of the Environment Services Association shortly after my appointment to this post. I understand my predecessor met representatives of the waste management industry on frequent occasions.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what responsibilities her Department has allocated to the Waste Resources and Action Programme regarding private finance initiative for waste management contracts. [124729]

Mr. Morley: The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) have currently been allocated no specific responsibilities regarding private finance initiative for waste management contracts. They do, however, have a wide ranging interest in local authority procurement and how this takes account of markets for recycle and waste minimisation. As part of this, WRAP are jointly sponsoring a "toolkit" project that seeks to capture best procurement practices that have been used in past private finance initiative schemes for possible use in future schemes.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's forthcoming report into the environmental and health impacts of waste management methods; if she will list the *(a)* individuals, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* industry groups consulted as part of the compilation of the report; when the report will be published; and if she will make a statement. [126692]

Mr. Morley: The Review of the Health and Environmental Impacts of Waste Management is being conducted by a team led by Enviros, who carried out work of a similar nature for the Strategy Unit report "Waste not, Want not", and Professor Roy Harrison of Birmingham University. Full details of the methodology and sources consulted will be published as part of the report.

The output of the review is currently undergoing the first phase of peer review, which is being carried out by the Royal Society. The final report is due to be published in the autumn.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of recycling targets on *(a)* local authority waste strategies and *(b)* the collection of green waste. [126716]

Mr. Morley: No assessment has been made to date of the impact of the statutory recycling targets on either local authority waste strategies or the collection of green waste.

Under DEFRA's Waste Implementation Programme a Local Authority Support Team has been set up to support local authorities. As part of its work, the Team is reviewing Municipal Waste Strategies, Waste Local Plans, Regional Waste Strategies arid emerging Spatial Strategies. It is intended that the Team will then give Local Authorities useful feedback on any elements within the waste strategies which might suggest that they will not reach their statutory recycling targets and on ways of addressing such problems.

The number of households with a green waste collection rose from 1.6 million in 2000–01 to 3.1 million in 2001–02. The percentages of waste collection or unitary authorities collecting some green waste similarly rose from 17 per cent. in 2000–01 in 2002–03. We believe that the establishment of recycling targets will have been a contributing factor in bringing about this increase.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was given in grants by her Department for research and development relating to waste management in each year between 1998 and 2002; and how much is allocated for such research in each year from 2003 to 2005. [126877]

Mr. Morley: The Department funds research into waste directly, and indirectly through a number of bodies such as its NDPBs. Funding is shown in the following table.

Defra's new Waste Implementation Programme team funding will be allocated to projects in accordance with a three year strategy, which will be drawn up following a review of existing research provision and the identification of future research requirements, supervised by a new Information Advisory Group chaired by Defra and including key non-Defra stakeholders.

£ million

Organisation	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Defra	0.19	0.24	0.16	0.16	0.18			
Defra—Waste Implementation Programme						5	5	5
Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP)					6.79			
Environment Agency			1.24	1.48	1.23			

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs by what percentage waste produced in the UK has changed in each of the last five years. [125572]

Mr. Morley: Data are not available to estimate the percentage change in all waste produced on an annual basis. The Department's annual Municipal Waste Management Survey for England shows the following increases for municipal and household waste.

Million tonnes

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Municipal waste arisings	25.7	26.3	27.4	28.1	28.8
Annual percentage increase	4.6	2.5	4.1	2.5	2.6
Household waste arisings	23.3	23.6	24.7	25.1	25.6
Annual percentage increase	3.5	1.1	4.9	1.6	1.8

Water

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research she has commissioned into the environmental impact of water use by consumers since 1997; what estimates have been made of future years; and if she will make a statement. [126181]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency has the duty to secure the proper use of water resources, ensuring that there is a balance between the needs of water consumers and the environment. As part of its research programme, the Environment Agency commissions applied research aimed at furthering the understanding of the complex link between water flows and levels and the ecology of rivers, lakes and wetlands.

In 2001 the Agency published national and regional strategies, "Water Resources for the Future", which identified areas where abstraction is believed to be unsustainable.

In 2001 the Environment Agency also published "A scenario approach to demand forecasting" which considered how future water use could be influenced by different socio-economic futures.

Each year water companies update their water resources management plans which project, for each area, how water companies will meet the water supply-demand balance taking into account environmental aspects.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the amount of water which leaked from water company pipes in each year since 1997; what measures she is taking to reduce the number of leaks; and if she will make a statement. [126362]

Mr. Morley: Reported leakage from water companies' pipes since 1997 (in megalitres/day) was as follows:

1996–97: 3,295
1997–98: 2,955
1998–99: 2,618
1999–2000: 2,431
2000–01: 2,365
2001–02: 2,527

Since the Water Summit in 1997, Ofwat has set water companies annual leakage targets. This mechanism has achieved a significant reduction in leakage, both on the distribution network and customers' supply pipes. Most companies are now at, or close to their Economic Level of Leakage. This is the level at which it would cost more for a water company to further reduce its leakage than to use an alternative source of water. Water company leakage data are published annually by the Director General of Water Services in the "Security of supply, leakage and the efficient use of water" reports, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. Companies' leakage performance for 2002–03 will be published at the end of this month.

Wild Mink

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's policy is on dealing with wild mink in the countryside. [126766]

Mr. Bradshaw: American mink are an invasive non-native species and were introduced into Great Britain for fur farming in 1929. Release of mink into the wild is prohibited under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Their population has continued to increase in range and numbers it is thought the rate of increase is declining.

The responsibility for the control of feral mink rests with those people most likely to benefit from such control, that is, individual landowners and occupiers. It is entirely at their discretion as to whether they wish to take such action against mink on their land.

However, predation by mink has been a factor in the decline of our native water vole population. The Government's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for water vole encourages humane control of mink where they pose a threat to water vole populations.

There are various initiatives under way, limited geographically and financially, including some mink trapping in river catchments, supported by combinations of the Environment Agency (the lead organisation for the water vole BAP), English Nature and the local Wildlife Trusts, and other conservation organisations. These aim for local suppression of mink numbers, for example to assist water vole populations, rather than eradication.

Defra has no current plans for an eradication programme given the wide distribution of mink and the costs associated using current techniques for control.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment the Government have made of the overall funds required by Afghanistan for *(a)* a programme for the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants as referred to in the Department's parliamentary briefing paper on Afghanistan of July and *(b)* reconstruction in *(i)* the provincial regions and (ii) urban areas. [127039]

Hilary Benn: Japan is the lead nation on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR). In conjunction with the Afghan Transitional Administration and the International Community, Japan has set up the Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme (ANBP) to implement demobilisation and reintegration programmes as part of security sector reforms. ANBP is a three-year programme estimated to cost $127 million, with an initial budget for the first year of $33 million.

At the recent Tokyo Conference on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration, more than $50 million was pledged by international donors. This is a good start. However, we must keep working on securing financing throughout the process. DFID, working closely with FCO and MOD, are also funding a Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration expert, who has been seconded to the UN in Kabul, to assist with Security Sector Reform.

The Afghanistan Transitional Administration has produced an integrated development plan in the National Development Budget. This covers all reconstruction plans in the provincial regions and urban areas as put forward by the Afghanistan Transitional Administration. Donors have pledged nearly $1.7 billion dollars for 2003–04 for Afghanistan, nearly 90 per cent. of what the Afghanistan Transitional Administration has requested.

AIDS

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assistance the Department provides to African nations in the fight against the AIDS epidemic. [126868]

Hilary Benn: DFID recognises that HIV/AIDS is a terrible human catastrophe and is one of the most important development challenges facing Africa. Over £190 million was committed to programmes focusing on HIV/AIDS and sexual health in sub-Saharan Africa last year, with intensive bilateral activities in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Over £25 million has been committed to support the International Partnership Against AIDS in Africa (IPAA) initiative—a regional, Africa-led initiative aimed at building Governments' national responses to the AIDS crisis, with a focus on Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi, and Ghana.

At the global level, DFID has increased HIV/AIDS related expenditure from £38 million in 1997–98 to over £270 million in 2002–03. Considerable additional financial support continues to be provided through institutions such as WHO, UNAIDS, UNFPA, and NGOs and civil society organisations in an effort to combat this disease and support those already living with it. The Secretary of State recently announced an additional $80 million commitment to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria bringing our total commitment to $280 million over the period 2001 to 2008.

Baghdad Museum

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what aid the Department is giving towards the refurbishment of Baghdad Museum and its Sumerian collection. [118591]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development is not giving any assistance towards the refurbishment of Baghdad Museum. DFID's assistance to Iraq is concentrated on supporting the reconstruction efforts and humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people. DFID has committed just over £177 million to Iraq in 2003–04.

Burundi

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent assessment the Department has made of the humanitarian situation in Burundi. [126397]

Hilary Benn: The DFID Country Representative returned to Bujumbura on 17 July to assess the situation. Recent fighting in the capital has left many civilians killed or injured, and many more have been displaced. The Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) medical centre (supported by DFID) treated 220 war wounded last week.

The general humanitarian situation in the country remains poor, with very high levels of disease, high rates of malnutrition and, resulting from this, high levels of mortality. There are serious problems of access to some communities. Last financial year we provided about £1 million for humanitarian support. So far this financial year we have provided funding of £400,000 through MSF for medical support in Bujumbura Rural and nutrition programmes in Karuzi. We stand ready to make further responses to the humanitarian needs of those most vulnerable. Our humanitarian work focus on nutrition and health support, channelled through international relief organisations.

The 2003 EC budget for humanitarian assistance to Burundi totals US$15 million (about £9.67 million), of which 19.38 per cent. is attributed to the UK.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what funds the Department placed with the Burundi Multidonor Debt Trust Fund in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001, *(c)* 2002 and *(d)* 2003; how much of the pledges have been released; and what percentage of released funds have gone to the Africa Union Force. [126398]

Hilary Benn: DFID pledged an initial US$ 1 million to the World Bank Multidonor Debt Trust Fund (MDTF) at the Geneva Roundtable Meeting in December 2001. We agreed to make an additional

contribution of US$1 million following the Geneva Donors Roundtable Meeting in November 2002. These funds were released in March 2003. We are encouraging other donors to contribute to the MDTF.

The purpose of the MDTF is to help Burundi finance the servicing of its multilateral debt obligations, and so none of its funds will go to the African Mission in Burundi (AMIB). DFID has, however, contributed £3.9 million to AMIB from the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool, for equipment costs related to the Mozambican contingent.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what proportion of the Department's humanitarian aid pledged to Burundi has been delivered; and what discussions the Department has had with the European Union concerning its delivery of its commitment. [126399]

Hilary Benn: Last financial year we provided some £1 million for humanitarian work in Burundi. All this has been utilised. For 2003–04 we have earmarked about £2 million for humanitarian work. In June 2003 we provided £400,000 through MSF for medical support in Bujumbura Rural and nutrition programmes in Karuzi covering the period 1 July to 31 December 2003. We are currently considering Appeals for 2003 from international relief organisations and stand ready to make further responses to humanitarian needs through them and proposals received from international NGOs.

We are in close contact with the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) in Burundi through our DFID Country Representative, who meets regularly with other humanitarian donors to ensure a co-ordinated and effective response. We also participate in the European Community's Humanitarian Affairs Committee in Brussels.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent discussions the Department had with parties to the conflict in Burundi with respect to international humanitarian law; and what plans he has to bring to justice those guilty of human rights abuses in Burundi. [126400]

Hilary Benn: The UK both bilaterally and as part of the international community regularly raises human rights issues and international humanitarian obligations in relation to the Burundi conflict. The EU is deeply concerned about the ongoing violations of human rights and humanitarian law in Burundi and continues to call on all sides to cease the fighting.

We are also funding the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) which is providing international humanitarian law training for the Burundian Army. We keep in close contact with the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the ICRC in Burundi regarding their work in this area.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what financial and technical assistance the Government is giving to the Burundi Government to help develop an effective system of justice; and who the leading donor is on these issues. [126404]

Hilary Benn: We have made it clear to the Burundi Government that we are ready to provide support on security sector reform, which could include support to the police should they require it. Belgium is the most active donor in the justice sector and is supporting a number of NGOs.

The EC is also considering providing support to the justice sector.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent assessment the Department has made of sexual violence and targeted rape in Burundi in the last year; and what action his Department is taking. [126405]

Hilary Benn: We receive regular reports on the humanitarian and human rights situation in Burundi, including sexual violence, from the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN Office for Human Rights, the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) and NGOs such as Human Rights Watch. The UK is active—within the EU, UN and bilaterally—in pressing all the parties involved in the conflict to start fulfilling their humanitarian obligations to the people of Burundi. In terms of financial support, DFID has contributed £400,000 to ICRC's programme in Burundi which includes a project in support of women who are victims of violence.

Chad/Cameroon Pipeline

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development when the World Bank will release periodical external audit reports for the Chad/Cameroon pipeline project. [126408]

Hilary Benn: Project arrangements provide for regular financial audits on the Chad-Cameroon pipeline project's accounts. We understand from the World Bank Group that financial audit reports are not made public. However, reports from the International Advisory Group (IAG) and the External Compliance and Monitoring Group (ECMG) who carry out regular external supervisions of the technical and environmental aspects of the project, and from the Inspection Panel who respond to requests from private individuals are available publicly on the World Bank website (in the case of the Inspection Panel reports, after discussion by the World Bank Executive Board). The latest reports are those issued by the IAG on 18 June, the ECMG on 22 April 2003 and the Inspection Panel on 2 May 2003.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what monitoring and supervision the project construction phase for the Chad/Cameroon pipeline project has had. [126409]

Hilary Benn: The Chad/Cameroon Petroleum Development and Pipeline project is subject to various forms of monitoring and supervision. The World Bank Group are being advised by the External Compliance and Monitoring Group (ECMG) in monitoring implementation of the Environmental Management Plan, and by an International Advisory Group (IAG) to advise on broader implementation issues, including those that need to be addressed to achieve the project's developmental objectives. Both the ECMG and IAG

make regular site visits. In addition, the Inspection Panel provides an independent forum for private citizens who believe that they have been negatively affected by the project. Reports from all these bodies are made public and can be found on the World Bank website. These third party reviews supplement the Bank's own monitoring and supervision of the project which includes site visits, internal reporting and continual discussions with the project sponsors.

The above measures are in addition to on-going monitoring by the Consortium and by the Governments of Chad and Cameroon. The Consortium produce quarterly reports which are also available publicly.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development when the World Bank will publish cost figures for the Chad/Cameroon Pipeline Project. [126410]

Hilary Benn: The estimated cost of the project which was reported in the original World Bank/International Finance Cooperation Project Appraisal Document (April 2000) was US$3.7 billion, the majority of which is being provided by the private sector. We are informed by the World Bank that this figure has not been revised upwards by the project sponsors.

Child Trafficking

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what measures the Department is taking to tackle *(a)* illegal trafficking of children, *(b)* exploitation of children through child labour and *(c)* the commercial sexual exploitation of children. [126861]

Hilary Benn: The trafficking of children is part of a wide range of issues relating to the migration of poor people to better their lives, and to their vulnerability to national and international smugglers and traffickers. Trafficking is an international problem requiring co-ordinated action. DFID's aim is to work to eliminate the poverty and social injustice that can lead to such abuse. Through our programmes to promote sustainable development and end poverty, DFID is helping to reduce the circumstances that give rise to this appalling trade, and which make women and children especially vulnerable. With other Government Departments, we are supporting the efforts of Governments and international agencies to strengthen social protection and justice in line with international treaties.

For example, in south-east Asia, we are supporting the International Labour Organisation's work to reduce the trafficking of women and girls, many of whom would enter the sex industry, in Laos, Thailand, China (Yunnan), Cambodia and Vietnam. It involves a number of activities to raise awareness and prevent the trade. In the Balkans, we recently supported the International Organisation for Migration in training the various agencies dealing with the victims of trafficking, including police, social workers and the legal profession, in order to create and disseminate models of good practice.

The Government are also committed to helping to eliminate child labour, particularly the worst forms such as child slavery and all forms of abusive or exploitative work. Many programmes supported by DFID help end these practices and provide assistance to such children and their families through improving livelihood opportunities, and access to education, health, justice and protection, and through our support to the promotion of socially responsible business such as the Ethical Trading Initiative.

Commodity Stabilisation Mechanisms

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment the Department has made of the role of commodity stabilisation mechanisms in future trading relations between the European Union and developing countries. [126259]

Hilary Benn: A number of commodity stabilisation mechanisms (including buffer stocks arrangements and export quotas) have been employed in the past, generally within the framework of International Commodity Agreements concluded between producer and consuming countries. In general, these mechanisms have not been successful and their practical limitations have been clearly demonstrated in practice.

Consequently, the UK is not supportive of direct intervention in commodity markets through globally imposed or similarly orchestrated measures designed to maintain or stabilise commodity prices. Rather, the UK favours initiatives that are voluntary, transparent, financially self-sustaining and which minimise market distortions.

DFID therefore does not intend to undertake any formal re-assessment of the potential role of commodity stabilisation mechanisms in future trading relations between the European Union and developing countries. Moreover, it is DFID's view that other institutions, such as the European Commission or the Common Fund for Commodities, might be better placed to conduct any such future assessment.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Flight: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how many *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* press officers, *(c)* civil servants, *(d)* advisers to civil servants and *(e)* permanent staff were working for the Department in each year since 1996. [126478]

Hilary Benn: *(a)* DFID has employed two special advisers since 1997. We do not recognise the term advisers to civil servants; *(b)* The number of Press Officers is:

Year	*Number of Press Officers*
1996–97	6
1997–98	6
1998	4
1999–2000	3.3
2000–01	4.5
2001–02	4
2002–03	5

(c) The number of Civil Servants (permanent staff) can be found in the annual publication Civil Service Statistics. Copies of the publication are laid in the

Libraries of both Houses. The latest edition, based on April 2002 data, was published on 24 July 2003; these figures include press officers.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Horam: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how many of the Department's policies have been screened for their environmental impact since June 2001; how many environmental appraisals have been conducted, and on what policy issues; and what information has been published about these screenings and appraisals. [124721]

Hilary Benn: DFID recognises the importance of environmental assessment in ensuring that environmental sustainability is integrated into development policy, planning, programmes and projects.

In line with this, DFID has recently updated its environmental screening procedures to make them more efficient and effective in addressing:

changing ways that aid is being delivered (such as by direct budget support and sector-wide approaches); and

the need to better respond to the opportunities that environmental considerations provide for improving the prospects for achieving sustainable development, the Millennium Development Goals and poverty reduction, while also recognising the need to manage risks.

The new procedures, and guidance on the screening process, are detailed in DFID's Environment Guide (2003). This has been revised and is available to the public on DFID's website.

Where appropriate, screening will initiate a more comprehensive appraisal and, if necessary, a full environmental impact assessment in the case of projects or strategic environmental assessment in the case of policies, plans and programmes. Examples include:

Environmental Appraisal of DFID Support to Rural Decentralisation in West Bengal;

Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy; and

Strategic Environmental Assessment to support Russia's World Trade Organisation negotiations/accession planning.

Additionally, DFID is committed to the Sustainable Development in Government frameworks and targets, and progress on these is reported on our website.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will list the EU Directives implemented by the Department since 8 June 2001. [126592]

Hilary Benn: Since 8 June 2001, the Department for International Development has not been required to implement any development Directives. It would incur disproportionate cost to identify other EU Directives implemented within the Department since 8 June 2001.

Foreign Direct Investment

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what steps the Government plans to take to encourage the flow of foreign direct investment to the poorest nations of the developing world; and what international mechanism the Government supports to facilitate this. [126239]

Hilary Benn: The Government believe that, alongside domestic private investment, more quality, productive foreign direct investment is essential for growth and poverty reduction in developing countries. DFID supports a wide range of international efforts directed at improving the overall investment climate for such investment. These include support for: Comprehensive Investment Climate Assessments by the World Bank Group and the Commonwealth Business Council, which help to identify investment obstacles in particular countries; research by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and NGOs on the benefits and costs of foreign direct investment; and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) programme of technical assistance, which helps developing countries build their capacity to better understand, attract and regulate foreign investment. The Government also believe that an international investment agreement negotiated in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) could complement these and other initiatives aimed at facilitating foreign investment flows to developing countries.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development whether the Government support the use of Government revenues rather than exports to assess the sustainability of heavily indebted poor country debts. [126260]

Hilary Benn: In 1999, the UK Government led the way in securing the revision of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) framework to ensure that it provides these countries with a permanent solution to their debt problem and frees up resources to tackle poverty. The merit of the new framework is that countries qualify for debt relief if their debts exceed either 150 per cent. of their annual export earnings or 250 per cent. of Government revenues, whichever gives the greater amount of debt relief. Relief is provided to bring each country's ratios down to these levels. The reduced debt sustainability ratios under this new framework have allowed more countries to benefit from the enhanced HIPC initiative, with deeper levels of debt relief.

Iraq

Mr. Amess: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on *(a)* the content of basic humanitarian supplies destined for Iraq and *(b)* the progress of those supplies towards intended destinations in Iraq. [126492]

Hilary Benn: Basic items such as food and medicines are being supplied to Iraq through organisations such as the World Food Programme and the World Health Organisation. These agencies report that such items are being imported in sufficient quantities to meet Iraq's needs.

Iraq's Public Distribution System for food aid was restarted on 1 June 2003. The World Food Programme reports that by the end of the month, rations had been

provided to about 26 million people. Distribution of food and medical supplies within Iraq have been hampered in some areas by the security situation there. For example, while medical supplies are being delivered to main provincial warehouses, rapid and effective distribution to clinics has not always been possible.

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what steps are being taken to improve the security of food storage facilities in Iraq. [126852]

Hilary Benn: Coalition forces are providing security for many key food storage facilities. Resources are also being provided to Iraqi Ministry of Trade (MOT) governorate offices to carry out emergency improvements to storage sites to make them more secure. This work will include the installation or repair of gates and perimeter fencing, and new or improved lighting. Coalition forces have also been training MOT guards, who will be armed. In Baghdad, plans are being made to provide the guards with mobile phones so that they have a direct link to local police stations.

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how many people have been immunised as part of the national immunisation campaign in Iraq. [126853]

Hilary Benn: The aim of the national immunisation campaign is to vaccinate 4.2 million children under the age of five against preventable diseases. Before the conflict, 98 per cent. of children under the age of five in Iraq were vaccinated for polio, and 92 per cent. for measles. Routine immunisation of children was suspended from the start of military action on 20 March 2003. An estimated 210,000 children were born in Iraq between then and mid-June. To rectify the break in the immunisation programme a number of national immunisation days have been announced by the Ministry of Health. The first took place on 22 June. Further national immunisation days are due to be held over the coming weeks. UNICEF reports that sufficient vaccines are now available in Iraq for six to eight months of routine immunisation activities.

The World Health Organisation is also contributing to the reactivation of Iraq's Expanded Programme of Immunisation by re-establishing the country's vital disease surveillance system.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by his Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if he will make a statement. [126206]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development has let only one such contract since 1997—to Metropolitan Telephone Service (MTS), part of the Office of Government Commerce (OGC), in respect of managed telephone services.

The cost of the contract is as follows.

	£
2000–01	864,653
2001–02	649,236
2002–03	674,948
2003–04	140,269
Total	2,329,106

The contract is still in place.

Jamaica

Joyce Quin: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what discussions the Department has had with the Government of Jamaica about the programme to eradicate screwworm in that country; and whether the Department has made a financial contribution to the programme. [126079]

Hilary Benn: There has been no discussion between the Department and the Government of Jamaica on the prospect of British support for the eradication of screwworm in Jamaica. The National Screwworm Eradication Programme in Jamaica is funded primarily by the US Department of Agriculture—who are attempting to establish a permanent sterile fly barrier zone in Central America and the Caribbean—and by the Jamaican Chamber of Commerce. DFID's support for Jamaica is focused on two key areas: *(a)* restoring security and social and economic inclusion and *(b)* improving services and opportunities for the poor.

Kenya

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how much was spent by the Department on health projects and programmes in Kenya in each year since 1997. [126493]

Hilary Benn: Spending on health projects and programmes in Kenya since 1997 is shown in the following table. In addition, DFID also provides funding for health through multilateral channels but information on this is not available centrally.

Financial year	*Stg £*
1996–97	4,493,943.00
1997–98	4,080,843.00
1998–99	9,642,880.00
1999–2000	7,192,730.00
2000–01	7,841,043.00
2001–02	9,052,965.00
2002–03	15,065,020.00
Total	57,369,424.00

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how many officials from *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other Government Departments are working in Kenya in connection with overseas aid programmes and projects. [126494]

Hilary Benn: There are currently 60 DFID officials working in Kenya; 21 UK appointed staff and 39 appointed in country. Of these 60 officials, four have a regional East Africa role, three are working in a project support office, three are resident in Kenya but working

on the Sudan and Somalia conflict prevention programmes and six are Associate Professional Officers working on projects.

Under the jointly funded Africa Conflict Pool (FCO/MOD/DFID) there are also four British Army officers from the Ministry of Defence resident in Kenya and providing training on peace-keeping to the Kenya Army.

Kyrgyzstan

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment he has made of the impact poor harvests in southern Kyrgyzstan will have on the nutrition of children in the country; and if he will make a statement. [126847]

Hilary Benn: DFID directly supports health reform, rural livelihoods, water and environment, social development and governance in Kyrgyzstan. Through our work with the European Commission we are providing support to the EU Food Security Programme in Kyrgyzstan. They have not made a specific assessment of the impact of poor harvests in southern Kyrgyzstan on children's nutrition. We have asked the EU Food Security Programme to make an assessment of the situation.

Liberia

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on the measures his Department is taking to improve facilities for the treatment of cholera patients in Liberia. [126846]

Hilary Benn: We have allocated £1.5 million for humanitarian relief since the increase in violence several weeks ago in and around Monrovia. To date just under £1.2 million of this has been committed, to ICRC, Merlin and Save the Children (UK). All three agencies are using our funding in whole or in part for health services. We do not know precisely what proportion of these funds is assisting cholera victims.

Although the security situation makes it difficult to be precise about case numbers and morbidity rates, estimates from sources on the ground suggest that there have been about 1,630 cases in the current cholera "season", including 15 deaths. Reports from Merlin say that in their areas of operation the situation has improved slightly. It is essential that access is given to national and international agencies to improve water supplies and sanitation.

Millennium Development Goals

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development whether the Government support the linking of levels of debt servicing by developing countries to the achievement of the millennium development goals. [126261]

Hilary Benn: The UK Government agree that heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) must receive the resources they need to finance their Poverty Reduction Strategies. In calculating their levels of debt sustainability, account should be taken of this. But debt relief alone cannot deliver the resources needed to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Deeper debt relief to HIPC countries would not significantly increase the net amount of development finance available, as this would have to come mainly from the multilateral development institutions since most bilateral debt has already been written off. We therefore support debt relief which is deep enough to ensure debt sustainability, while recognising that additional donor resources are needed to enable HIPC countries to meet the MDGs.

Ministerial Visits

David Davis: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will list the *(a)* foreign and *(b)* UK visits made by the Secretary of State since 1 April; what the cost was to public funds of each trip; who she met; and what gifts were received. [126885]

Hilary Benn: The Government publish the overall costs of all ministerial overseas travel and a list of all visits overseas by Cabinet Ministers costing in excess of £500 on an annual basis. The list for the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003 was published by the Prime Minister on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 482W. The next list for the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 will be published at the end of the financial year.

In respect of gifts received, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 14 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 482W.

In the UK, the Secretary of State, Baroness Amos visited DFID's Headquarters in East Kilbride, Scotland in May. The cost of flights and taxis totalled £394.90.

Montserrat

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what support the Department is providing to the inhabitants of Montserrat following the recent volcanic eruption; and what plans the Department has for future support. [126744]

Hilary Benn: We have set aside up to £1.5 million for immediate emergency relief purposes. This includes work to clear up the ashfall and to repair damaged infrastructure. We will continue to assist and, in consultation with the Montserratian authorities, to keep the situation under close review. Support totalling £45.6 million is already available for Montserrat over the three-year financial year period 2003–04 to 2005–06.

Mozambique Summit

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development if he will make a statement on the outcomes of the second African Summit in Mozambique. [126845]

Hilary Benn: The second summit of the African Union (AU) in Maputo in July focused on the internal mechanisms of the organisation. Mozambique took over the Presidency from South Africa and Joaquim Chissano, President of Mozambique, will Chair the AU

for the next year. Alpha Oumar Konare, ex-President of Mali, was voted Chair of the AU Commission and Patrick Mazimhaka of Rwanda was elected Vice-Chair.

The following Commissioners of the AU were elected: Peace and Security, Said Djinnit (Algeria); Political Affairs, Dolly Joiner (The Gambia); Infrastructure and Energy, Bernard Zoba (Congo Brazzaville); Social Affairs, Gawanas Bience Philomina (Namibia); Human Resources, Science and Technology, Saida Agrebi (Tunisia); Trade and Industry, Elisabeth Tankeu, (Cameroon); and Rural Economy and Agriculture, Rosebud Kurwijila, (Tanzania). The position of Commissioner for Economic Affairs is yet to be filled.

The budget of the AU will increase from $31 million to $43 million in the next year and staffing is set to double to approximately 761 in the long term. The contributions of the richer countries of the AU will rise to 8.5 per cent., while the contributions from poorer countries will be 0.75 per cent. and those from the poorest will fall to 0.25 per cent.

The Pan African Parliament and the Peace and Security Council each require 27 ratifications to be established. This was not achieved at the AU Summit. However, more countries did ratify: the Pan African Parliament now has 17 signatures and the Peace and Security Council 15 (although this number may have increased since the Summit). In the event of the Peace and Security Council receiving 27 ratifications before the next AU Summit, the Assembly mandated the Executive Council to elect the membership of the Peace and Security Council. No decision was taken on the location of the Pan African Parliament. The Assembly also adopted the Draft Protocol on the Court of Justice of the AU, which is now open to ratification by member states.

The Assembly decided that the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) will be integrated into the AU in three years, or when the relevant institutions of the AU are in place, whichever comes first. The integration will be overseen by Alpha Oumar Konare, Chair of the AU Commission, and President Olusegun Obasanjo, Chair of the Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee of NEPAD.

For more information on the outcomes of the Summit see www.au2003.gov.mz

Poverty Reduction Strategies

Mr. Caton: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what plans the Department has to encourage the participation of civil society in poverty reduction strategies for heavily indebted poor countries. [126703]

Hilary Benn: DFID country teams encourage wide participation in PRSP consultation processes, including funding stakeholder workshops when appropriate. Support can be provided directly from country programmes, or indirectly by means of Partnership Programme Agreements where local civil society organisations (CSOs) are provided with support to enable them to help the consultation process.

Examples of such activity include:

funding academics to train journalists (Ethiopia)

support to Actionaid to facilitate CSOs participating in the policy process (Kenya)

support to an umbrella group of CSOs devoted to poverty reduction (Zambia)

funding a think tank and associated civil society task forces working on policy implications of the government's reform programme (Bangladesh)

project on the development of CSOs (Kyrgyz republic)

co-funding with UNDP the national PRS civil society consultative process (Guyana)

Rwandan National Electoral Commission

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment he has made of the report of the Rwandan National Electoral Commission, with particular reference to the shortfall in funding for conducting the August presidential and September parliamentary elections. [126844]

Hilary Benn: We support the Government of Rwanda and the National Election Commission's plans for the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections. They are important landmarks in the reconstruction of Rwanda.

For some time DFID has been working with both the NEC and a group of donors, chaired by United Nations Development Programme, exploring ways to best support the NEC's ambitious strategic plan. A multi-donor basket fund is to be set up, and early indications are that the resources can be found to implement the plan. We will support this and hope to decide the nature of our contribution shortly.

Single Hull Obsolete Tankers

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment the Department has made of the use of single hull obsolete tankers on the West African coast and their impact on the surrounding environment. [126411]

Hilary Benn: We have not made any such assessment.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development on how many occasions between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental Special Advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [126685]

Hilary Benn: One Special Adviser travelled in an official capacity with the former Secretary of State to Angola in April 2002 and to Washington and New York in March 2003. The trips cost £4,022.40 and £4,509.70 respectively.

Staff Costs

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development how many staff the Department and each agency and non-departmental

public body for which the Department is responsible had in each year since 1997; and what the cost of those staff was in each of those years. [122262]

Hilary Benn: Data on staffing levels in the Civil Service are collected from departments and agencies twice-yearly, in April and October. Headline figures are published under National Statistics guidelines via a press notice. Those for October 2002 were published on 27 February 2003.

A copy of the press notice is available on the World Wide Web at www.civil-service.gov.uk/statistics. Copies of these documents are also placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

More detailed information on the Civil Service is published annually in "Civil Service Statistics", copies of which are laid in the Libraries of both Houses. The last edition, based on April 2001 data, is due to be published at the end of July 2003.

DFID is not responsible for any agencies or for staff in non-departmental public bodies falling within its remit. DFID wholly owns CDC Group plc, but the company is completely autonomous and DFID has no role or responsibility for its staff matters.

Staff costs information are published in DFID's (formerly ODA's) annual Departmental Reports.

Sudan

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what steps he is taking to increase food aid supplies in Southern Sudan; and if he will make a statement. [126848]

Hilary Benn: Urgent humanitarian needs remain in Sudan, including in south Sudan. High rates of malnutrition, epidemic levels of disease, and destitution caused by forced displacement make continued humanitarian assistance necessary. DFID continues to respond by funding humanitarian help. We have committed over £13 million so far in 2003, including a contribution of £2.5 million to the World Food Programme. We recognise that humanitarian needs are likely to increase in Sudan in the event of a peace agreement and are planning for this.

John Barrett: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what assessment he has made of the health facilities available in the Abyei county of Sudan. [126850]

Hilary Benn: DFID has made no direct assessment of the health facilities in Abyei, nor committed funds for Abyei specifically. However, we have contributed £2,500,000 this year to the ICRC as part of their Sudan Appeal which will be directed towards health where there is the most need. We also provide core funding to UN health agencies (eg WHO and UNICEF) who are working in the area. We support emergency health assistance across Sudan and are monitoring the situation closely—should the conditions deteriorate in Abyei we would consider providing support.

Uganda

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development which programmes the Department funds to help with the reintegration and care of children who have escaped abduction in Northern Uganda. [126406]

Hilary Benn: Since 1988 the chief recruitment method of the Lord's Resistance Army has been the abduction and forced conscription of children. UNICEF Uganda estimate that 20,400 children have been abducted since 1990 and 6,000 of them are still unaccounted for. DFID supports the work of a number of indigenous civil society groups working for peace, including the religious and traditional leaders. We also support agencies working specifically with child ex-combatants and their communities.

We have provided support to Save the Children Fund (Denmark), which includes help for the re-integration of child ex-combatants and a grant to help improve the conditions for the increasing number of unaccompanied children who are sleeping in town centres at night to avoid abduction. We also support the Uganda Red Cross (URC) via the British Red Cross, which is involved with the provision of relief items, assessment and family tracing and reunion.

Over the last 12 months we have provided £2.5 million in emergency aid through the World Food Programme, UNICEF and the Uganda Red Cross Society and we are currently in the process of programming a further £1 million for urgent humanitarian needs.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what recent discussions the Department has had with the Government of Uganda in relation to disarmament and the collection of small firearms. [126407]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development has not had any recent discussions with the Government of Uganda on disarmament and small arms.

Together with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence under the Global Conflict Prevention Pool (GCPP), DFID funds two non-governmental organisations, Saferworld and SaferAfrica, which are assisting the Government of Uganda to develop a five-year National Action Plan to control the proliferation of small arms. This includes disarmament and gun collection activities.

£460,000 has also been provided from the GCPP to the Nairobi Secretariat to assist states, including Uganda, to implement the commitments they made in March 2001, on signing the Nairobi Declaration. The Secretariat provides training and advice to National Focal Points set up in signatory countries to prevent the proliferation of weapons and ammunition. This support included participation by the Ugandan National Focal Point Coordinator at the recent United Nations Biennial Meeting of States on Small Arms and Light Weapons, held in New York on 7–11 July 2003.

TREASURY

Cancer

Mr. Baron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new cases of *(a)* acute myelogenous leukaemia, *(b)* chronic lymphocytic leukaemia, *(c)* oesophageal cancer, *(d)* osteosarcoma, *(e)* pancreatic cancer, *(f)* retinoblastoma, *(g)* sarcoma, *(h)* stomach cancer, *(i)* thyroid cancer and *(j)* Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia have been recorded in each of the last five years. [127019]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. John Baron, dated 22 July 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning how many new cases of *(a)* acute myelogenous leukaemia, *(b)* chronic lymphocyctic leukaemia, *(c)* oesophageal cancer, *(d)* osteosarcoma, *(e)* pancreatic cancer, *(f)* retinoblastoma, *(g)* sarcoma, *(h)* stomach cancer, *(i)* thyroid cancer and *(j)* Waldenstrom's macroglobulinaemia. I am replying on his behalf. (127019).

The figures for persons are as follows:

Registration of newly diagnosed cases of cancer: selected sites, England, 1999

Site	*ICD-10 code*[1]	*Number*
Actute myeloid leukaemia	CP2.0	1656
Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia	C91.1	1926
Oesophageal cancer	C15	5893
Osteosarcoma	C40-C41	421
Pancreatic cancer	C25	5882
Retina[2]	C69.2	32
Sarcoma	C47,C49	1113
Stomach cancer	C16	7875
Thyroid cancer	C73	1053
Waldenstom's macroglobulinaemia	C88.0	249

[1] International Classification Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10)

[2] There may be a small number of additional cases code to C69–9 'eye, unspecifieo'.

Source:

Office for National Statistics. Cancer statistics—registrations, England 1999 series MBI no 30. London: The Stationary Office, 2002. Available on the National Statistics website at http// wwwstatisticsgovuk/downloads/them helath/Mbi 30/MBI 30 pdf.

The latest available cancer incidence figures are for registrations for newly diagnosed cases of cancer in 1999. These figures are published in Cancer statistics—registrations, England 1999[1], which includes additional breakdowns by age and sex. This is available on the National Statistics website at http// www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/them health/MBI 30 pdf.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the latest survival rate is for those suffering from *(a)* childhood acute lymphoblastic leukaemia, *(b)* acute myelogenous leukaemia, *(c)* chronic lymphocytic leukaemia, *(d)* esophageal cancer, *(e)* osteosarcoma, *(f)* pancreatic cancer, *(g)* retinoblastoma, *(h)* sarcoma, *(i)* stomach cancer, *(j)* thyroid cancer and *(k)* Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia. [127020]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. John Baron, dated 22 July 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning what the latest survival rate is for those suffering from *(a)* childhood acute lymphoblastic leukaemia, *(b)* acute myelogenous leukaemia, *(c)* chronic lymphocytic leukaemia, *(d)* oesophageal cancer, *(e)* osteosarcoma, *(f)* pancreatic cancer, *(g)* retinoblastoma, *(h)* sarcoma, *(i)* stomach cancer, *(j)* thyroid cancer and *(k)* Waldenstrom's macroglobulinaemia. I am replying on his behalf. (127020).

The frequency with which cancer survival statistics are updated depends on how commonly the cancer occurs. Cancer survival rates are routinely estimated for eight major cancers, which account for almost 60 per cent. of all cancers. These include stomach and oesophageal cancer. The latest available survival rates for the eight cancers are for patients diagnosed in 1993–95 and followed up to the end of 2000. Five years relative survival rates by sex and age group for England are available on the National Statistics website at: http//www.statistics.gov.uk/ statbase/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D4924.xls. The five year relative survival rates for stomach cancer were 11.1 per cent. and 11.8 per cent. for men and women respectively, and for oesophageal cancer were 6.7 per cent. and 7.7 per cent. respectively.

The report Cancer survival in the health authorities of England 1993–2000 provides information about the methods used is available on the National Statistics website at: http:// www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme health/HSQ13 v4.pdf.

Pancreatic cancer is one of the twenty most common cancers, which together account for almost 90 per cent. of all cancers. The latest available cancer survival figures for those sites not included in the eight mentioned above, are for patients diagnosed in 1991–93 and followed up tot eh end of 1998. Five year survival rates by sex and age group for England and Wales for these cancers are published in the report Cancer survival in England and Wales, 1991–1998 which is available on the National Statistics website at:http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme health/ HSQ6Book.pdf. The five year relative survival rates for pancreatic cancer were 2.4 per cent. and 2.1 per cent. for men and women respectively.

The latest information on survival from the other requested cancer sites, with the exception of Waldenstrom's macroglobulinaemia, is summarised in Cancer Survival Trends in England and Wales, 1971–95: deprivation and NHS Region. This publication presents cancer survival trends in patients diagnosed between 1971 and 1990 and followed up for at least five years to the end of 1995; it is available in the House of Commons Library. The five year relative survival rates for adults (aged 15–99) were 8 per cent. for acute myeloid leukaemia, 51 per cent. for chronic lymphocytic leukaemia, 51 per cent. for connective tissue (sarcoma) and 73 per cent. for thyroid cancer. For those cancers analysed for children (aged 0–14), the five year relative survival rates were:76 per cent. for childhood acute lymphoblastic leukaemia, 51 per cent. for osteosarcoma and 93 per cent. for retinoblastoma.

Survival figures for Waldenstrom's macroglobulinaemia are not available.

Lost Working Days

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of working days lost because of chronic pain in England in each year since 1997. [126352]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 21 July 2003:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning how many people died from *(a)* strokes and *(b)* stroke-related diseases each year since 1997, broken down by age group. (126506)

I refer you to the answer given in Hansard on 18th July 2001, column 213 to Linda Perham MP indicating that figures are to be found in the annual reference volumes 'Mortality Statistics: Cause DH2.' The latest publication in this series contains figures for stroke for 2001 and is available on the National Statistics website at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/Dh2_28/DH2No28.pdf

Causes of death in England and Wales were coded to the Ninth Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-9) from 1979 to 2000. Cerebrovascular diseases, which includes stroke and related conditions, were coded to 430–438. In the Tenth Revision (ICD-10), introduced in 2001, the same conditions are coded to 160–169. However, the way in which the underlying cause of death is selected from the conditions written on the certificate changed in ICD-10. This led to an increase of approximately 13% in the number of deaths attributed to cerebrovascular diseases in men and 9% in women. Time trends should therefore be interpreted with caution. The effects of the change in classification has been described in detail in ONS publications.[i,ii]

[i] Office for National Statistics. Results of the ICD-10 bridge-coding study, England and Wales, 1999. *Health Statistics Quarterly 14* (2002), 75–83.

[ii] Rooney C, Griffiths C, Cook L. The implementation of ICD-10 for cause of death coding—some preliminary results from the bridge coding study. *Health Statistics Quarterly 13* (2002), 31–41.

Chief Economic Adviser

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the responsibilities of the Treasury's Chief Economic Adviser. [126507]

John Healey: The Chief Economic Adviser to the Treasury advises on a broad range of the Treasury's macroeconomic and microeconomic policies. In addition he is the Chairman of the International Monetary and Financial Deputies Committee, the UK chair of the G20 Deputies and a member of the Treasury Management Board.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set up a review of the corporate governance guidelines of *(a)* HM Customs and Excise and *(b)* the Inland Revenue, with particular reference to the composition of their boards. [126485]

John Healey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter) on 2 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 270W.

Coinage

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many £1 coins are in circulation. [126112]

Mr. Boateng: No reliable estimate of the number of coins in circulation is available.

Consultation Documents

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the consultation documents issued by his Department in each of the last four years; what the cost was of producing each of these; how many documents were issued in each consultation; and how many responses were received in each consultation. [124577]

John Healey: The Government recommend that policy development should be done in close consultation with stakeholders. Formal consultation documents are only one part of a process, which includes meetings with stakeholders, consultation seminars, regional events and public meetings.

The specific information requested is not collated on a central basis and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost. However, a list of consultations run by the Treasury is available on the department's website at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/Consultations_and_Legislation.

EDS/Accenture Computer Systems

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* system failures, *(b)* faults and *(c)* downtime incidents there were on (i) the EDS supplied computer systems and (ii) the Accenture supplied computer systems in his Department and its agencies in each month since 1 April 2002. [125632]

John Healey *[holding answer 14 July 2003]:* The Inland Revenue and Valuation Office Agency are the only Treasury Departments and agencies that have IT services provided by EDS or Accenture.

The following table shows the extent of systems failures, faults and downtime incidents attributable to EDS against contractual performance measures from 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003.

Month	*Number of systems failures*	*Number of faults*	*Number of downtime incidents*
April 2002	0	6	13
May 2002	0	4	1
June 2002	0	3	10
July 2002	0	2	0
August 2002	0	2	0
September 2002	0	3	1
October 2002	0	5	0
November 2002	0	4	0
December 2002	0	5	0
January 2003	0	6	2
February 2003	0	5	4
March 2003	0	6	4

Note:
Overall average availability of the EDS systems has been 99.78 per cent. against an agreed average service level target of 98.7 per cent.

For the period from 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003 the NIRS2 service provided by Accenture was contracted to be available for a total of 5,082 hours. During that period there was a total of 17.7 hours of system unavailability. This equated to three incidents—classified as either service failure or downtime incidents attributable to Accenture—where the weekly service level target was not met. Overall average availability of the NIRS2 system has been 99.6 per cent. against an agreed service level target of 98 per cent. The two smaller systems supported by Accenture, Employers Index and

Debt Management System, have achieved their respective service level targets for system availability since April 2002.

EU Legislation

Bob Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many regulations originating from the EU have been implemented by the Treasury in each of the last five years. [120754]

John Healey: It would be disproportionately costly to identify which of the EC, ECSC and Euratom Regulations made in the last five years, the Treasury was responsible for, as the Department does not keep a central record of this information.

EU Directives and Regulations are published in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities, which can be found at: http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/

Euro

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the treatment of the membership of the euro under the draft Constitutional Treaty on the Future of Europe. [125714]

Mr. Boateng: The constitutional treaty produced by the European Convention confirms that "those member states which have not adopted the euro, and their central banks, shall retain their powers in monetary matters." (I-29.4). The constitutional treaty does not alter the terms of the UK's EMU protocol. The UK's EMU protocol will be re-adopted on the conclusion of the IGC.

Financial Products (Mis-selling)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints of mis-selling of *(a)* endowment policies and *(b)* other financial products by (i) tied agencies and (ii) independent financial advisers have been upheld by the Financial Ombudsman Service in (A) 2001, (B) 2002 and (C) 2003; what the total of fines levied for each category was by year; what average length of time it took to investigate each complaint; and what the longest period was a complaint has remained open. [126076]

Mr. Boateng: The Financial Ombudsman Service has advised the Treasury that the number of complaints upheld either wholly or in part were as follows.

Mortgage Endowment Complaints

	Substantially upheld	*Upheld in part*
2002–03		
IFAs	359	110
Tied Agents	3,906	854
2001–02		
IFAs	385	95
Tied Agents	2,758	690
2000–01[1]		

[1] In 2000–01, the Personal Investment Authority Ombudsman Bureau (PIAOB) dealt with mortgage endowment and other investment product complaints. The PIAOB did not record statistics about case outcome that can be analysed in this way. However, across the range of investment related complaints against both IFAs and tied agents, 46 per cent. of complaints were resolved by conciliation or mediation where both parties agreed voluntarily and of those cases that were resolved by adjudication or a final decision by an ombudsman, 22 per cent. were upheld in favour of the consumer.

Other Investment Products[1]

	Substantially upheld	*Upheld in part*
2002–03		
IFAs	411	201
Tied Agents	3,109	1,853
2001–02		
IFAs	170	68
Tied Agents	1,142	804
2000–01[2]		

[1] Personal pension plans, whole-of-life/non mortgage linked endowments and other 'packaged' investment products.

[2] In 2000–01, the Personal Investment Authority Ombudsman Bureau (PIAOB) dealt with mortgage endowment and other investment product complaints. The PIAOB did not record statistics about case outcome that can be analysed in this way. However, across the range of investment related complaints against both IFAs and tied agents, 46 per cent. of complaints were resolved by conciliation or mediation where both parties agreed voluntarily and of those cases that were resolved by adjudication or a final decision by an ombudsman, 22 per cent. were upheld in favour of the consumer.

Awards

The Financial Ombudsman Service does not punish or fine firms—the regulator, the Financial Services Authority, takes any such action.

In resolving disputes, the ombudsman service may make a 'money award' against a firm of such amount as it considers fair compensation for financial loss and or pain and suffering or damage to reputation or distress or inconvenience. Additionally or alternatively, the ombudsman service can 'direct' a firm to take such steps in relation to the complainant, as the ombudsman considers just and appropriate.

The Financial Ombudsman Service does not record 'money award' data as any such figure would not include cases which have been settled by way of agreeing that an offer of redress that a firm has made is fair compensation nor would it include the equivalent monetary value of any 'direction' that the ombudsman service may give.

Timeliness

Each year, the ombudsman service sets timeliness targets for resolving complaints. In 2000–01, 73 per cent. of cases at the PIAOB were closed within six months; 19 per cent. took between six and 12 months and 8 per cent. took over 12 months.

In 2001–02, the Financial Ombudsman Service closed 73 per cent. of cases within six months and 96 per cent. of cases within 12 months.

In 2001–02, the average time taken to resolve and close a case was just over five months.

In 2002–03, the ombudsman service introduced a new three month target and reported that it resolved 44 per cent. of cases within this time and that it resolved 76 per cent. of cases within six months.

The ombudsman service refined the measure for the average time taken and reported that it took just under four months to resolve a complaint by mediation or conciliation. And, where a detailed investigation was

required to settle the dispute—involving a full ombudsman review and decision—the average time taken was eight and a half months.

The oldest ombudsman case still open dates back to November 1997, and has remained open for 2,035 days.

It is the ombudsman service's policy to report any case that remains open to its Board so that the Directors can satisfy themselves that there are valid reasons for a case to be more than a year old.

Financial Services Authority

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the procedures for reviewing the Financial Services Authority's rule making *(a)* powers and *(b)* decisions. [126656]

Mr. Boateng: The main procedures for reviewing Financial Service Authority rules, as set out by the Financial Services and Markets Act (2000) (section 155), are the requirements for public consultation prior to the exercise of a rule-making power and completion of a cost-benefit analysis.

The main mechanism for reviewing decisions made by the FSA is the right of an aggrieved party to refer decisions to the independent Financial Services and Markets Tribunal.

Gangmasters

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to investigate fraudulent activities by gangmasters, with particular reference to loss of *(a)* income tax, *(b)* value added tax, *(c)* national insurance and *(d)* other revenues. [126733]

Mr. Luff: Inland Revenue and HM Customs & Excise are participators in a multi-agency initiative to tackle non-compliance and illegal activity by gangmasters. The other agencies involved are the Home Office, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

During 2002–03 two Inland Revenue specialist units settled 46 gangmaster investigations resulting in additional tax and National Insurance liabilities in excess of £4.3 million being identified. HM Customs and Excise is also looking at the activities of labour providers, particularly agricultural gangmasters, bringing together specialists to deal with education, support and compliance. In the last 18 months Customs has identified £5.9 million in arrears from 14 investigations into fraudulent evasion of VAT.

Iraq

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the size was of the bilateral debt owed by Iraq to the UK, which was reported to the *(a)* US Treasury and *(b)* the Paris Club; and what the value is of the frozen assets of the previous regime in Iraq under UK management. [122777]

John Healey *[holding answer 30 June 2003]:* As part of the exercise to establish the extent of Iraq's external debt, the Paris Club has been advised that unrecovered ECGD claims amount to some £625 million, plus an estimated interest accruing over the past 12 years of around £525 million.

Until the recent lifting of sanctions under UNSCR 1483, a total of US $648 million was estimated to be frozen in the UK under the Iraq (United Nations Sanctions) Order 2000. Under the terms of the Iraq (United Nations Sanctions) Order 2003, only the assets of Saddam Hussein, his associates and certain entities of the former regime remain frozen. If such assets are located in UK financial institutions, they may be subject to prior claims. As a result it is not possible at this stage to estimate what amounts will eventually be held by UK financial institutions. However the terms of UNSCR 1483 require all remaining assets associated with Saddam's regime to be transferred to the Development Fund for Iraq.

IT Systems

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the Treasury spent on IT *(a)* software, *(b)* hardware, *(c)* maintenance and *(d)* licences in 2002–03. [124419]

John Healey: During the 2002–03 financial year, HM Treasury has incurred expenditure on information technology to the following values:

	£
(a) Software	444,431
(b) Hardware	4,072,438
(c) Maintenance	39,217
(d) Licences	377,708

Post Office Card Accounts

Mr. Heald: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make additional funds available to the Department for Work and Pensions to cover an increase in the number of Post Office Card Accounts opened above the Government's estimates; whether he plans that the cost of accounts above the estimate will be met from within the Department's existing expenditure plans; and if he will make a statement. [125334]

Mr. Boateng: Provision was made in the Department for Work and Pensions 2002 Spending Review settlement for additional funding to be made available if card account numbers exceed the planning assumption.

Royal Protection

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer from which departmental budget the costs of *(a)* the Yeomen of the Queen's Bodyguard and *(b)* the Gentlemen at Arms are paid; and what the budget was in each of the last 10 years. [124638]

John Healey: Until 31 March 2001 the cost of the Yeoman of The Queen's Bodyguard and the Gentlemen at Arms was met from the grant-in-aid for the Maintenance of the Occupied Royal Palaces in England, provided by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The 2000 Royal Trustees Report agreed that certain expenditure met from the Votes of Government Departments or from the Consolidated Fund should be

met from the Civil List with effect from 1 April 2001. The costs of the Yeoman of The Queen's Bodyguard and the Gentlemen at Arms have been met from the Civil List since 1 April 2001. Her Majesty's Treasury also contributes towards the costs of ceremonial dress of the Captains of the Yeoman of the Queen's Bodyguard and the Gentlemen at Arms, who are also Government Whips.

The information from 1992–93 onwards is as follows:

		£
1992–93	DCMS	39,000
1993–94	DCMS	55,000
1994–95	DCMS	68,000
1995–96	DCMS	56,000
1996–97	DCMS	60,000
1997–98	DCMS	74,000
1998–99	DCMS	69,000
1999–2000	DCMS	78,000
2000–01	DCMS	83,000
2001–02	Civil List[1]	61,000
2002–03	Civil List[2]	73,000

[1] The Civil List accounts for expenditure on a calendar year and this figure therefore covers the period 1 April to 31 December 2001.
[2] The Civil List figure covers the period 1 January to 31 December 2002.

The Civil List costs include charges for Gentlemen Ushers.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the changes in the rate of Stamp Duty which would be necessary were the UK economy to operate under interest rates as set by the European Central Bank to offset the interest rate sensitivity of the UK housing market. [121442]

John Healey: The Government's policy is that entering EMU on the basis of sustainable and durable convergence is essential so that the UK can benefit from the substantial increases in cross-border trade, investment, competition and productivity that EMU could provide. Sustainable and durable convergence between the UK and euro area must be demonstrated to have been achieved to ensure we and others could live comfortably with euro interest rates on a permanent basis.

As the Chancellor announced in his EMU statement on 9 June, the Government has put in place a reform agenda—right for the British economy, and the process of achieving sustainable and durable convergence and the flexibility necessary for Britain to succeed sustainably within the euro zone. The reforms include:

step changes in the planning and supply of housing and in the market for long-term mortgages; and

a fiscal stabilisation discussion paper considering the appropriate measures that could be taken to stabilise output volatility in the absence of domestic monetary policy were the UK to join EMU.

The fiscal stabilisation discussion paper considers the option of extending the regulator power to additional taxes such as stamp duty, and notes that it might be possible to use stamp duty to reduce volatility in the housing market and to affect personal consumption, but that a potential drawback is that it may affect labour mobility. The paper did not estimate the change in the rate of stamp duty that would be necessary to do this, which would depend on the circumstances prevailing at the time.

Tax Revenues

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the use of tax money that is identifiably sourced from particular taxes for particular areas of Government spending. [125249]

Mr. Boateng: In some cases, where the Government are raising revenue for a specific purpose, it is appropriate to reinforce the purpose of the tax measure by linking it to the spending which it finances. For example, the increase in national insurance contributions from April 2003 is financing a significant increase in resources for the Health Service.

DEFENCE

Guardsmen Fisher and Wright

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether *(a)* Mark Wright and *(b)* James Fisher are serving with the Irish Guards regiment in Iraq. [125923]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence does not comment on an individual soldier's postings. I am therefore withholding the information under Exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Privacy of an individual).

Afghanistan (Campaign Medal)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when a campaign medal will be issued for personnel who have served in operations in Afghanistan. [126142]

Mr. Caplin: The matter of a medal for campaign service in Afghanistan has been deliberated by the Ministry of Defence and a case submitted to the HD Committee. They will consider the case and pass their recommendation to The Queen for Her approval. An announcement will be made when a decision has been reached.

Aircraft Carrier Programme

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the estimated cost of the aircraft carrier programme. [126807]

Mr. Ingram: Our estimate for the cost of the demonstration and manufacture contract is around £3 billion. These cost estimates will be further refined during the remainder of the Assessment Phase.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to use the Eurofighter Typhoon on the new aircraft carriers. [126808]

Mr. Caplin: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces gave on 20 May 2003 *Official Report*, column 678W.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the *(a)* tactical and *(b)* strategic implications are of building two aircraft carriers each with a capability of carrying 20 aircraft instead of the 48 originally specified; [126969]

(2) what the implications would be for UK plans to acquire the future Joint Strike Fighter, if the specifications of the two projected fleet aircraft carriers are downgraded; [126974]

(3) what changes he estimates to the in-service dates of *(a)* the first and *(b)* the second future fleet aircraft carrier, if the projected cost of the ships rises to £4 billion. [126977]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence is not considering any proposals to build two Future Aircraft Carriers capable of carrying only 20 aircraft.

The Future Aircraft Carrier programme is currently midway through its Assessment Phase. This phase is intended to reduce risk in emerging design solutions and balance the key parameters of performance, time and cost in order to best meet our developing capability requirements, both in terms of the ships themselves and in the aircraft they will operate. The current forecast cost estimate for the Demonstration and Manufacture (D&M) contract is around £3 billion. Our target In-Service Dates for the two carriers remain 2012 and 2015 respectively and these will be confirmed prior to the award of the D&M contract, currently planned for Spring 2004.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make it his policy to rule out the acquisition of smaller aircraft carriers than the two fleet aircraft carriers originally specified; [126970]

(2) what plans he has to ensure that the two projected fleet aircraft carriers are built in accordance with their original specifications. [126981]

Mr. Ingram: In the Strategic Defence Review published in 1998, it was envisaged that the two new Future Aircraft Carriers would be in the order of 30,000–40,000 tonnes and be capable of carrying up to 50 fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. The intention, as with any other new equipment project, has always been to refine the design during the assessment phase in order to best meet our developing capability requirements. The Carrier programme is currently midway through this assessment phase. The key specifications will be determined in capability terms prior to the award of the demonstration and manufacture contract, currently planned for Spring 2004.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he plans to rescind the awarding of the construction contract for the two fleet aircraft carriers to BAE Systems following that firm's altered estimate of the costs of the project; [126971]

(2) whether he plans to bring the design and construction of the two projected fleet aircraft carriers under the control of a single company; [126976]

(3) what mechanism he put in place to ensure that BAE Systems' construction project conformed to Thales' design project for the two fleet aircraft carriers. [126983]

Mr. Ingram: The Future Aircraft Carrier (CVF) programme is currently in its assessment phase and we have not yet placed a contract for the construction of the vessels. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 30 January 2003, the best means of delivering the carrier programme is via an alliance approach involving BAe Systems as preferred prime contractor with responsibility for project and shipbuilding management, Thales UK as key supplier of the whole ship design, and the Ministry of Defence. That remains our view. Subject to reaching a satisfactory outcome to the final stage of the assessment phase and to contractual negotiations, we plan to reach the final investment decision for award of the Demonstration and Manufacture contract in spring 2004.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what adjustments he will make to the *(a)* overall defence budget and *(b)* proportion of the defence budget allocated to the Royal Navy following the altered estimate of the costs of the future fleet aircraft carrier project. [126972]

Mr. Ingram: The 2002 Spending Review set out defence spending plans for 2003–04 to 2005–06. Every year the Ministry of Defence re-examines its programme to ensure that it delivers the required military capability in the most cost-effective way. The equipment programme is constructed on a capability, not single Service, basis.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to maintain existing plans for *(a)* the construction of new and *(b)* the maintaining in service of existing Royal Navy warships of other classes, following the altered estimate of the costs of the future fleet aircraft carrier project. [126973]

Mr. Ingram: The Future Aircraft Carrier (CVF) programme is currently midway through its assessment phase. This phase is being used to refine the design specifications in order to best meet our developing capability requirements. No decisions have yet been reached on the final costs of the project.

Our plans for the construction of new, and the maintaining in service of existing, Royal Navy Warships of other classes are based on how to deliver capability requirements in the most cost effective manner across the full Defence programme. There is no direct linkage to the costs of the CVF project.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the accuracy of BAe Systems' revised estimate of the cost of the two future fleet aircraft carriers; [126975]

(2) what explanation he has received from BAE Systems for the revision of the estimated cost of two fleet aircraft carriers. [126982]

Mr. Ingram: The CVF Programme is still in the Assessment Phase, which is intended to reduce risk in emerging design solutions and balance the key parameters of performance, time and cost. Our cost estimates will be further refined during the remainder of the Assessment Phase to take into account maturing design and price information from BAE Systems and Thales UK.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the future viability in service of *(a)* HMS Ark Royal, *(b)* HMS Illustrious and *(c)* HMS Invincible. [126978]

Mr. Ingram: The Royal Navy Invincible Class carriers (CVS) are currently scheduled to remain in service until replaced by the newer, larger and more capable carriers (CVF) in the first half of the next decade.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to scrap additional Royal Navy ships to enable the budget for the two future fleet aircraft carriers to be increased. [126979]

Mr. Ingram: None.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the two projected fleet aircraft carriers in a future expeditionary strategy. [126980]

Mr. Ingram: The Future Aircraft Carriers, CVF, will have the primary role of providing the United Kingdom with a flexible expeditionary offensive air capability. It is intended that CVF will operate the STOVL variant of the Joint Strike Fighter, the Maritime Airborne Surveillance and Control (MASC) capability and other rotary wing aircraft from all three services in a variety of roles.

With the increasing likelihood of future operations being conducted by forces far from home bases and without the guarantee of host nation support, CVF will form a major element of our Joint Rapid Reaction Forces. It will be able to operate world-wide and contribute to a full scope of military tasks, either as part of a national or multinational task force.

It is planned that CVF will be available continuously at high readiness and be capable of rapid deployment over extended periods in order to maximise the potential to influence the early stages of a developing crisis.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings he has had with French *(a)* ministers and *(b)* officials to discuss the CVF programme; whether the CVF contractors have been asked by his Department to prepare carrier designs smaller than 50,000 tonnes; and if he will make a statement. [125599]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and the other Defence Ministers routinely meet with their French opposite numbers and the United Kingdom's Future Aircraft Carrier programme has frequently been discussed in that context. There is a high level steering group which helps to facilitate UK French co-operation and, in addition, there have been regular meetings on the subject both between project officials from the UK's Defence Procurement Agency and their equivalents in the DGA and on a navy-to-navy basis. These meetings have identified several areas for potential co-operation.

The CVF project is currently in the Assessment Phase which is designed to balance performance, cost and time considerations and to maximise cost effectiveness and value for money for the capability required. Nothing will be fixed until the investment decision is taken next year and the award of the Demonstration and Manufacture contract in Spring 2004 as originally planned.

Anti-personnel Mines

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how far out to sea off Diego Garcia ammunition ships containing anti-personnel mines are anchored. [102348]

Mr. Rammell: I have been asked to reply.

Ships carrying ammunition are sent to pre-positioned anchorages between two and three nautical miles from shore within the lagoon.

Apples

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of apples consumed by the armed forces were grown in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the United States of America and *(c)* Chile in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [126806]

Mr. Caplin: In the last 12 months 51 per cent. of the apples consumed by the armed forces were grown in the USA, 25 per cent. in the UK and 24 per cent. in Chile.

Armed Forces (Health Care)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been paid to non-NHS health providers in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Germany and *(c)* elsewhere for the treatment of (i) members of HM armed forces and (ii) their families in each of the past five years. [118799]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 12 June 2003]:* Payments to private healthcare providers in the United Kingdom in respect of treatment of Service personnel totalled £0.769 million in 2000–01, £4.095 million in 2001–02 and £3.326 million in 2002–03 These costs relate to centrally run treatment initiatives and single Service schemes. No expenditure on private healthcare providers has been recorded centrally prior to 2000–01. Medical care for dependents of Service personnel in the UK is the responsibility of the NHS.

Healthcare in Germany is provided by the British Forces Germany Health Service (BFGHS), a consortium comprising the Ministry of Defence, Guys and St Thomas' Healthcare Trust (GST) and the Soldiers' Sailors, and Airmen's Families Association (SSAFA). Secondary healthcare is mainly provided by 5 Designated German Provider (DGP) hospitals under contracts managed by GST on behalf of the BFGHS for all Service and MOD UK-based civil servants and their families.Total Payments to GST, SSAFA and to non-DGP hospitals in each of the last five years were as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1998–99	34.180
1999–2000	35.945
2000–01	32.498
2001–02	32.498
2002–03	34.687

The figures include the contract cost of primary and community care for Service and civilian personnel and entitled dependants. The figures exclude the cost of primary care for RAF personnel and their dependants prior to 2001–02 as this was provided separately by the RAF. It is not possible to identify separately costs incurred in respect of Service personnel and their dependents.

Details of payments to non-NHS healthcare providers elsewhere in the world are only available in respect of Cyprus and Gibraltar. Figures are not available for other locations, as they would only be recorded at unit level and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Figures for Cyprus and Gibraltar are shown as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1998–99	0.348
1999–2000	0.494
2000–01	0.174
2001–02	0.119
2002–03	0.129

The figures cover the cost of all treatment provided outside of the service hospitals at these locations, for Service personnel, MOD UK-based civil servants and their dependants, it is not possible to identify separately costs incurred in respect of Service personnel, their dependents and other entitled personnel.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces have undergone treatment on the NHS in each of the last five years to ensure that they are able to be fully deployed. [118801]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 12 June 2003]*: Records are only maintained centrally of the numbers of Service personnel treated by NHS hospital trusts which host the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine (RCDM) and the MOD Hospital Units (MDHUs). Information on the numbers of Service personnel treated elsewhere in the NHS could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The table shows the number of Service patients treated in the NHS trusts which host the RCDM and MDHUs in the five years 1998–99 to 2002–03. The figures represent all treatment provided as it is not possible, without disproportionate cost, to identify separately treatment which enabled Service personnel to become fully deploy able.

	In-patient and day cases	*Out-patients*
1998–99	5,759	14,663
1999–2000	5,497	12,183
2000–01	6,723	15,019
2001–02	9,005	21,372
2002–03	7,772	19,076

Notes:

1. Out-patient figures for 1999–2000 exclude MDHU Derriford due to problems with the hospital trust's patient administration system.
2. Figures include MDHU Northallerton from 1999–2000, the year it was established.
3. Figures from 2000–01 include the Royal Surrey County Hospital, which provides oromaxillofacial treatment under a separate SLA with MOD on similar terms to the MDHU SLAs
4. Figures include the RCDM and MDHU Portsmouth from 2001–02, the year they were established

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he has taken to enable members of the armed forces to receive priority treatment in the NHS. [118802]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 12 June 2003]*: Service personnel are entitled to the full use of NHS hospitals on the same basis as other United Kingdom citizens if appropriate military provision is not available. They will therefore benefit from the sustained investment through the NHS Plan which will reduce waiting times. Provision for accelerated diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation to return Service personnel back to fitness faster than would otherwise be the case is available through Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with NHS Trusts that host the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine (RCDM) in Birmingham and Ministry of Defence Hospital Units (MDHUs). These SLAs also include provision for fast-track out-patient appointments if Service personnel are needed for immediate operational deployment. In addition, in 2003–04, up to £8 million for accelerated diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation is available for use in the NHS or, as appropriate, with private healthcare providers. A pilot scheme for fast-tracking orthopaedic cases is currently being run at MDHU Northallerton. Finally, the joint MOD/ Department of Health Reception Arrangements for Military Patients (RAMP) ensure that in times of conflict casualties are returned to the UK and receive the care that they need in NHS hospitals.

Challenger 2

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 3 June 2003 to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), *Official Report*, column 32W, on armoured vehicles, and his answer of 3 June 2003 to the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), *Official Report*, column 40W, on Iraq, what the *(a)* operational, *(b)* logistic and *(c)* economic basis is for replacing the Challenger 2 tanks. [119491]

Mr. Ingram: The decision to reduce the number of Challenger tanks in Iraq to a single squadron, deployed with 19 Mechanised Brigade, was taken for purely operational reasons. The rest have been withdrawn since there is only a very limited security role for them following the end of the conflict with Saddam Hussein's regime.

Cluster Munitions

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 3 June 2003, ref. 110261, whether he has received reports of civilian casualties in Iraq as a consequence of the dropping of cluster bombs that have yet to be verified. [117759]

Mr. Hoon: The preponderance of unexploded munitions littering Iraq following decades of conflicts means that it is difficult to deduce definitively what injuries may have been caused by particular kinds of ordnance. United Kingdom Field Hospitals have reported eight injuries which may possibly have been

caused by cluster munitions. I am aware of the existence of further unsubstantiated reports in the media and from other sources.

Deceased Service Personnel

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on procedures followed by his Department in notifying next of kin of deceased service personnel; what advice is given in respect to the speed with which next of kin must be informed of their bereavement; which personnel are involved; and what efforts are made to ensure that details are not released to the media in advance of the notification of the next of kin. [126102]

Mr. Caplin: There are well established procedures for the reporting of casualties and missing personnel. The overriding principle is to minimise distress to bereaved families and to ensure they received timely and accurate information. However, it does take time to establish the necessary details, particularly in operational circumstances. With plentiful sources of immediate communication and close media interest, inevitably there is a risk that families will learn of an incident before they are formally notified. The Ministry of Defence endeavours to minimise this risk. An officer is despatched to inform the family as soon as the relevant details have been established. Normally the officer would be from the relevant unit or parent establishment, but where a family lived a significant distance away, consideration would be given to using an officer from a closer unit (preferably, although not necessarily, of the same Service) or the civilian police. Service officers selected to notify families are senior and experienced; often the unit commander or deputy will conduct this important and difficult duty themselves.

We do not publish the names of fatalities until we have confirmation that the next of kin, and in some cases the extended family network, have been informed.

Defence Equipment

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Government-to-Government agreements governing the sale, supply and transfer of defence equipment were agreed between 1 January 2002 and 31 December 2002; on what date each agreement was signed; and with which country each agreement was reached. [123158]

Mr. Caplin: The following government to government agreements governing the supply of defence equipment were agreed between 1 January 2002 and 31 December 2002:

Date	*Country*
12 February	Czech Republic
21 March	Canada
22 March	Australia
22 May	Austria
23 June	Bangladesh
24 July	Jordan
18 October	Thailand

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether British Aerospace (*a*) sought and (*b*) obtained clearance from his Department for the payment of agency commission in connection with the sale of defence equipment to Qatar. [115148]

Mr. Caplin: There is no requirement for United Kingdom companies to seek permission of the Defence Export Services Organisation to make commission payments; commercial arrangements are a matter for the companies involved, which are required to operate within the law.

Defence Projects (Israel)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Israeli Government concerning the purchase of stinger missiles. [121678]

Mr. Caplin: My right hon. Friend has had no such discussions.

Depleted Uranium

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken to evaluate whether depleted uranium dust arising from the use of depleted uranium munitions by Coalition forces in Iraq has been blown into urban areas of Iraq; and what assistance is being given to the current evaluation by the United Nations Environment Programme of the environmental impact of the invasion of Iraq. [111241]

Mr. Caplin: The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) will assess depleted uranium (DU) levels in the environment as part of its post-conflict environmental survey of Iraq later this year.

In support of the UNEP survey, the Ministry of Defence has provided UNEP with details of United Kingdom DU firing locations and has offered to provide advice on carrying out risk assessments on DU within urban areas and on long-term monitoring of DU in the environment, including water. In June 2003, MOD scientists completed a preliminary technical assessment of some Iraqi equipment and sites thought to have been struck by DU rounds. MOD officials presented their findings to UNEP on 10 July 2003. UNEP welcomed the MOD presentation and agreed that future surveys should be coordinated with MOD to avoid duplication and obtain maximum scientific benefit.

The Department for International Development has, in principle, agreed to part-fund the UNEP assessment of post-conflict environmental issues in Iraq. In her 11 June letter to the Executive Director of UNEP, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, made clear that Government officials would continue to share information with UNEP's Post Conflict Assessment Unit and also indicated that UK civil servants seconded to the Coalition Provisional Authority, and our Armed Forces, could provide the UNEP assessment team with information and practical assistance on technical, operational and sustainable development issues. My right hon. Friend and UK Government officials have since met UNEP representatives to discuss their work programme.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much depleted uranium, by weight, has been recovered in Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [119451]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 19 June 2003]*: No depleted uranium has been recovered in Iraq. Surface lying depleted uranium (DU) ammunition will be cleared from the battlefield along with dangerous remnants of war. Since DU strikes do not pose an immediate threat to health and safety we will not be undertaking any recovery of DU buried in the ground, except where required in small quantities for scientific purposes to support the Ministry of Defence corporate DU programme.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reporting was undertaken by Challenger 2 tank crews in respect of recording the firing of depleted uranium ammunition during the recent Gulf conflict; and whether similar measures were undertaken during the 1991 Gulf conflict. [119199]

Mr. Ingram: The tonnage of Depleted Uranium ammunition fired by Challenger 2 tanks in the recent Gulf conflict and of the location of the Challenger tanks when engagements took place has been recorded by the Ministry of Defence and this information has been made available to the UNEP. Similar measures were not undertaken during the 1991 Gulf War.

Disease Prevention

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what action he has taken to prevent the spread of disease among troops in the Gulf; [123599]

(2) what plans he has to improve prevention of the spread of disease among troops in battle. [123598]

Mr. Caplin: Preventing transmission of disease is an important element of force health protection for troops participating in military action, including those who deployed to the Gulf. We seek to achieve this through a combination of medical intelligence to identify threats from endemic diseases and potential biological warfare agents; appropriate medical countermeasures, such as vaccination and antimalarial drugs; and physical protection measures, such as insecticide impregnation of uniforms and use of mosquito nets and appropriate insect repellents. In addition, educating personnel in the use of good hygiene and sanitation practices and enforcement of appropriate Health and Safety regulations play an important part.

Medical personnel deployed to the Gulf included infection control and environmental health specialists and Service personnel were given briefings on health issues covering prevalent diseases, hazards arising from potential environmental exposures, personal hygiene, sexual health, stress, and acclimatisation to living in arduous environments.

The armed forces will continue to develop best practice to prevent the spread of disease among deployed troops, taking account of any lessons identified from current and future military operations.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the Department's policies have been screened for their environmental impact since June 2001; how many environmental appraisals have been conducted, and on what policy issues; and what information has been published about these screenings and appraisals. [124716]

Mr. Caplin: Three environmental appraisals of policy work are currently under way. These are: RAF Strategic Review of RAF Brize Norton and RAF Lyneham, Defence Training Review and the Defence Estates Core Sites Strategy.

To address the requirements for policy level environmental appraisal the Department is trialling an Integrated Policy Appraisal (IPA) tool in conjunction with other Government Departments. Work has commenced on two pilot appraisals: The New Chapter of the Strategic Defence Review and the UK Military Flying and Training System (UKMFTS).

A number of environmental appraisals and more detailed assessments have been carried out on a programmes and projects brought about as a result of policy decisions, arising from the Strategic Environmental Appraisal (SEA) of the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) in July 2000. Appraisals and, when required, more detailed assessments are carried out for site re-organisation, training exercises and the deployment of specific equipment. This work is supported by the Ministry of Defence's Sustainability Appraisal Handbook (2002).

Information regarding individual appraisals and assessments are not held centrally at present. However, when appraisal tools are more fully integrated into business processes, MOD will be able to report on numbers of appraisals carried out and also, depending on the subject area, results of the appraisal.

European Constitution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with *(a)* colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and *(b)* counterparts in the European Union about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European Constitution. [124786]

Mr. Caplin: As part of the normal Whitehall process, I and my officials have had regular correspondence with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss all aspects of the Convention. We have also had regular contact with Member and Accession States to discuss issues arising in the Convention. In line with exemptions 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the normal practice of Governments to disclose details about internal discussions, or information whose disclosure would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs.

Fleet Air Arm

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Fleet Air Arm squadrons will equip with Harrier GR7/9; and how many aircraft will be allocated to each squadron. [126148]

Mr. Caplin: Two Front Line Fleet Air Arm squadrons will be equipped with the Harrier GR7 GR9 in 2006. Each squadron will comprise nine aircraft.

Force Readiness

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what deployment times are denoted by his Department's scaling of (i) very high, (ii) high and (iii) medium states of readiness. [125606]

Mr. Caplin: The following table shows the deployment times for very high, high and medium states of readiness for United Kingdom forces:

Readiness state		
1	24–48 hrs	Very high
2	3–5 days	Very high
3	6–10 days	Very high
4	11–20 days	High
5	21–30 days	High
6	31–60 days	Medium
7	61–90 days	Medium

Gripen Jets

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the United States Government first made complaints of alleged corrupt practice by BAe Systems regarding the possible sale of Gripen jets and the decision by the Government of the Czech Republic to buy supersonic aircraft to his Department; and which United States administration department made this complaint. [123008]

Mr. Caplin: A number of individuals in the United States Administration have raised allegations against BAe Systems since the US industry decision in May 2001 not to continue participation in the Czech Republic's fighter aircraft competition. However, we have not been able to find, nor have we been given, any evidence whatsoever to substantiate the allegations and this has been made abundantly clear to the US Government.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many meetings have been held since 1 January 1999 between Ministers in his Department and the United States Administration in which allegations of corrupt practice by BAE Systems regarding the possible sale of Gripen jets and the decision by the Government of the Czech Republic to buy supersonic aircraft were discussed; when each of these meetings was held; where each of these meetings was held; and which United States Administration Departments attended each of these meetings. [123009]

Mr. Caplin: None.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his department first received allegations of corrupt practice by BAe Systems regarding the possible sale of Gripen jets and the decision by the government of the Czech Republic to buy supersonic aircraft. [123160]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence has not received any substantiated allegations of corrupt practice by BAe Systems over the possible sale of Gripen jets to the Czech Republic.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department first received allegations of corrupt practice by BAe Systems regarding the supply of a package of Hawk and Gripen jets to the Government of South Africa. [123010]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence has received no substantiated allegations of corrupt practice by BAe Systems regarding the supply of Hawk and Gripen aircraft to the Government of South Africa.

Iraq

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what port facilities under UK naval and military control are available for humanitarian assistance to be brought into Iraq. [112251]

Mr. Ingram: There are no port facilities now under United Kingdom military control. The local Iraqi council administers the very limited port facilities at Basra and Stevedore Services, a United States contractor, administers the single major facility at Umm Qasr.

There is a small UK presence at Umm Qasr, to deal with UK military supplies that arrive by sea, but the forces there have no role in running the facility.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what quantities of supplies were transported from the UK to the Gulf *(a)* by sea and *(b)* by air for Operation Telic. [112253]

Mr. Ingram: In advance of the start of combat operations around 135,000 Linear Metres and 6,300 Transport Equivalent Units of supply were transported by sea to the Gulf. In addition, around 29,500 Air Load Equivalent Short Tonnes of supply were transported by air.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what inquiries his Department is pursuing following the tattooing of an Iraqi child with Nazi insignia following the Paras v. Locals football match in Baghdad. [119205]

Mr. Ingram: No allegations have been made concerning such an action or any other activity at the football match, therefore there is no basis for an investigation.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken by British forces in Iraq to secure known nuclear sites from looters and terrorist groups seeking to obtain nuclear materials and technology. [120793]

Mr. Ingram: There are no known nuclear sites in the United Kingdom's Area of Operations.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the six military police officers killed in Iraq *(a)* were armed and *(b)* had an armed escort. [122459]

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what communications the military policemen killed in Iraq on 24 June had with other UK forces during the time they were under siege; and if he will make a statement. [123348]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the written statement given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 2 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 20 22W. There is still an on-going investigation into the incident and it would be inappropriate for me to comment further at this stage. Once the investigation is complete I will make public as many of its findings as possible, subject to operational and other security constraints.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall) of 30 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 41W, on Iraq, if he will *(a)* examine reports of Iraqi deaths from eyewitness correspondents embedded with the military in the invasion of Iraq, *(b)* request the Coalition provisional authority to make a survey of deaths reported in hospitals in Iraq, from 19 March to 1 May, arising from military conflict and *(c)* make the estimating of Iraqi military deaths part of the aim of interrogation of Iraqi military commanders in custody. [123762]

Mr. Ingram: We take our obligations under International Law and the Laws of Armed Conflict to avoid collateral damage and excessive military casualties very seriously. Any loss of life, particularly civilian, is deeply regrettable, but in a military operation the size of Operation Telic it is also unavoidable. Through very strict rules of engagement, the use of precision munitions and the tactical methods employed to liberate Iraq's major cities, we are satisfied that the coalition did everything possible to avoid unnecessary casualties. We do not, therefore, propose to undertake a formal review of Iraqi casualties sustained from 19 March to 1 May.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with United Nations representatives regarding the use of UN troops in Iraq; and what proposals he has to involve the UN in the maintenance of law and order in Iraq. [123837]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 616W, to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen).

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether all UK Service personnel have access to air conditioned accommodation in current deployments in Iraq and Kuwait. [125596]

Mr. Ingram: Not all United Kingdom Service personnel currently deployed in Iraq and Kuwait have access to air conditioned accommodation, but all have access to air conditioned welfare facilities. Work is progressing to provide further air conditioning in accommodation areas throughout the area of operations.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of Iraqi munitions have been disposed of; and when the clearance will be completed. [125700]

Mr. Ingram: As of 27 July, the United Kingdom and Multi-National teams have destroyed 323,149 items of explosive ordnance, of which 211,550 were small arms ammunition. Non Government Organisations have recovered 180,353 items of explosive ordnance, of which 58,744 have so far been destroyed. The rest are in storage awaiting disposal. It is not possible to quantify the number of items cleared in terms of percentage. It is estimated that it will take between two and three years to completely clear the United Kingdom Area of Operations of explosive ordnance.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Iraqi children he estimates have been killed while dismantling Iraqi munitions in the last three months. [125701]

Mr. Ingram: There is no means of knowing how many Iraqi children have been killed while dismantling Iraq's munitions. Coalition forces have, however, made significant efforts to educate local populations about the dangers of unexploded munitions. The United Kingdom and other coalition Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams in the UK's area of responsibility have completed over 1,000 disposal tasks and destroyed over 100,000 individual munitions. The Theatre Mine Risk Education (MRE) plan has been developed with the support of UNICEF and the ICRC. A poster and leaflet campaign has been carried out; head teachers in Basrah have been briefed; and military teams are delivering Mine/UXO awareness training to primary and secondary schools daily, using material approved by the ICRC.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what resources for clearing Iraqi munitions are provided by *(a)* Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* NGOs. [125703]

Mr. Ingram: The United Kingdom Joint Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Group has provided seven Royal Engineer EOD Teams, three Royal Air Force EOD Teams, two Royal Logistic Core Heavy Improvised Explosive Device Disposal (IEDD)/ EOD Teams and 12 Royal Engineer echelon Troops equipped with heavy lift capability and four tonne vehicles who can operate with EOD teams for logistic disposal of larger EO caches. In addition, the Ammunition Inspectorate has provided two IEDD/ EOD Teams.

We work very closely with Non Government Organisation resources, the details of which are an issue for each Organisation to release.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people *(a)* captured and *(b)* still interned by British forces in Iraq are classified as enemy combatants; if he will list the other categories of people held by British forces and the number of persons in each category; whether any people captured were moved outside the country, and for what reasons; and what rights any person held in a category other than enemy combatant has. [125897]

Mr. Ingram: Those persons captured by British forces who had the status of enemy combatant were entitled to prisoner of war status and to be treated as such. As of 21 July 2003, the United States is holding one prisoner of war and 36 other persons captured by British forces,

who are either suspected of committing criminal offences or are interned where necessary for imperative reasons of security in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention. No prisoners captured by British forces in Iraq and transferred to US custody have been transferred out of Iraq. The rights of persons detained who are not classified as enemy combatants are contained within the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what co-operation has taken place between the United Kingdom and the United States of America on investigations into deaths by friendly fire during the Iraq conflict. [115791]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 3 June 2003]:* Both incidents of 'friendly fire' that occurred during operations against Iraq involving United States and United Kingdom forces are the subject of Boards of Inquiry, which have now convened. We are liaising closely with the US and a British Liaison Officer is in place on the US Board of Inquiry. We will be looking to ensure that both countries absorb any lessons identified.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of overall UK casualties during the Iraq war were caused by friendly fire. [127037]

Mr. Ingram: Fourteen percent of United Kingdom fatalities in Operation Telic were caused by friendly fire. The information in respect of all other casualties is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the types of vehicles occupied by British soldiers killed by friendly fire during the Iraq War; and to what extent they employed the combat identification equipment used by UK forces. [127038]

Mr. Ingram: Tornado GR4 aircraft, a Challenger 2 Main Battle Tank and a Scimitar CVR(T) armoured vehicle were subject to fatal friendly fire incidents in Operation Telic. All three vehicles were fitted with the correct combat identification equipment.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps were taken to secure *(a)* the Oil Ministry, *(b)* other ministries and *(c)* other official buildings in Iraq from looters and arsonists during the invasion and immediate post invasion period in Iraq. [126322]

Mr. Ingram: The Oil Ministry is located in Baghdad and has never fallen within the United Kingdom area of responsibility. Since the liberation of Iraq, UK Forces have been working to restore security through a number of different means including patrols, vehicle check points and static guarding. Certain sites within the UK area of responsibility are currently being guarded by UK Forces including key government buildings and public record offices. Overall, our approach is to re-establish local police and guard forces that will initially be trained and overseen by UK forces.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many weapons inspectors there are in Iraq. [126170]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 23 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 616W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith).

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which areas of Iraq have yet to be visited by weapons inspectors in their search for weapons of mass destruction; and if he will make a statement. [126176]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 1 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 204W, to the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden).

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his United States counterpart in respect of the search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. [126309]

Mr. Hoon: I am in frequent contact with the US Secretary of Defence. We discuss a range of Iraq-related issues, including WMD.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what use was made of British military *(a)* field hospitals and *(b)* medical resources to treat Iraqi civilians; and if he will make a statement. [121893]

Mr. Caplin: During operations in Iraq all wounded have been treated equally regardless of status or nationality. Between 19 March and 12 July 234 Iraqi civilians were treated in United Kingdom Field Hospitals, but we do not record centrally instances of local treatment by medical personnel in fielded forces.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when persons acting on behalf of the Government first entered Iraq this year without prior permission of the then Iraqi Government. [111362]

Mr. Ingram: Regular patrolling by United Kingdom RAF aircraft has been ongoing in Iraq since 1991 and was taking place on 2 January 2003. These patrols were being conducted without Iraqi permission. UK ground forces entered Iraq on 20 March 2003.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the number of *(a)* Iraqi civilians and *(b)* Iraqi military personnel (i) killed and (ii) injured as a result of Operation Telic. [111364]

Mr. Ingram: Whilst the Ministry of Defence has accurate data relating to the number of United Kingdom service personnel that have been killed or injured during Operation Telic, we have no way of establishing with any certainty the number of Iraqi casualties.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which units did not receive their full complement of desert kit before the beginning of hostilities in Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [111820]

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what delays there have been in issuing clothing and personal equipment to members of the armed forces serving in Operation Telic. [112029]

Mr. Ingram: By the beginning of hostilities on 19 March, 3 Commando Brigade had received all its requirement of personal desert equipment, 16 Air Assault Brigade had received 90 per cent., and 7th Armoured Brigade had received 50 per cent. Where necessary, allocation was prioritised according to greatest operational need. Details of individual unit allocations are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In the light of operations in Iraq, we will be reviewing our policy for the provision and distribution of desert clothing.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK staff were integrated with US Central Command in contingency planning for military operations in Iraq. [112031]

Mr. Ingram: During planning for military operations in Iraq the number of United Kingdom staff deployed to CENTCOM fluctuated regularly. On average about 30 personnel were deployed for planning purposes at any given time.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many prisoners held by British forces in the Gulf have been identified as *(a)* Fedayeen Saddam forces and *(b)* nationals from countries other than Iraq. [112079]

Mr. Ingram: British forces are currently detaining two people suspected of links with Fedayeen Saddam forces. They are the only two such people British forces have held during the conflict.

A total of 28 prisoners of war from countries other than Iraq were captured by United Kingdom forces in Iraq, as shown in the table. All have subsequently been released from custody.

Country	*Number*
Algerian	2
French	2
Jordanian	10
Sudanese	2
Syrian	12

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish the results of investigations into deaths by friendly fire during the Iraq conflict. [115793]

Mr. Ingram: Decisions will be taken as to what will be published from each investigation into deaths by 'friendly fire' once these investigations are complete. We will make public as many of the findings as possible, subject to operational and other security constraints.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the *(a)* role and *(b)* action of army logistics units in Iraq. [116664]

Mr. Caplin: Army logistic units in Iraq formed part of both the tri-service Joint Force Logistic Component and 1 (UK) Division which provided support to United Kingdom personnel in the Gulf. The role of logistic units in any operation is to ensure the sustainability and regeneration of combat power.

The logistic unit's achievements include the development of theatre infrastructure and the successful provision of combat service support to deployed units during the war-fighting phase. Post conflict, the Joint Force Logistic Component has undertaken a number of successful projects including the building of a fresh water pipeline from Kuwait to Umm Qasr, the opening of the port of Umm Qasr, the establishment of the Umm Qasr to Basrah railway and the distribution of humanitarian aid and assistance.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of whether the looting in Iraq is primarily non-political criminal activity. [117046]

Mr. Caplin: The looting following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime is judged to have been largely opportunistic criminal activity. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that there are small elements in Iraq who have been encouraging politically motivated crime.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the UN logistics report of 23 May regarding warehouse looting in Basra. [117051]

Mr. Ingram: The UN report quoted raised concerns about the looting of warehouses in Basra. Although United Kingdom forces have a presence at the Ministry of Trade warehouse in Basra, this is for administrative purposes and they are not responsible for security, which is a matter for local Iraqi security guards. UK forces do still conduct routine patrols in the area.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there is a need for increased British Army presence at the Iraqi Ministry of Trade warehouse in Basra which the British Army shares with the World Food Programme and the International Committee of the Red Cross. [117052]

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what protection British forces have provided to the World Food Authority warehouses in Basra; and what future plans the Department have to provide such protection. [125705]

Mr. Ingram: United Kingdom forces do have a presence at the Ministry of Trade warehouse in Basra, however this is purely for administrative purposes and they are not responsible for local security which is a matter for the local Iraqi security guards. UK forces conduct routine patrols in the area and do not intend to increase their presence.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the army has done to improve customs checks at Iraqi borders since 22 May. [117053]

Mr. Ingram: The lead agency for customs and immigration policy, organisation and manning is the Office of the Coalition Provisional Authority.

Within the UK Area of Responsibility, since 22 May 2003 twelve customs officers have been re-employed at the port authority at Umm Qasr. These officers served in Iraq customs prior to the conflict. Customs offices are currently located at Umm Qasr, Safwan and Basra. There are further customs officers at Basra who can be called forward to the port if additional support is required. The officers currently employed have received some refresher training from our Royal Military Police.

More widely, coalition forces continue to provide a secure environment in which the civil agencies can operate.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what efforts the British Army has made to restore the water system in Iraq. [117061]

Mr. Ingram: The 521 Specialist Team Royal Engineer (Water Development), under the co-ordination of a civil infrastructure team, has been engaged in supplying and repairing equipment to allow the restoration of the Iraq water system. This has included the provision of essential water treatment chemicals, the supply and redistribution of generators, pumps and treatment works, provision of temporary water, co-ordination of pipe repairs, arranging fuel deliveries to cover shortfalls, and provision of security at some water treatment plants and to pipe repair teams.

IT Contracts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many outsourced IT contracts have been signed by his Department in each year since 1997; how much each of these contracts is worth; with whom they are signed; how many have been renegotiated; how many are still in place; and if he will make a statement. [126191]

Mr. Ingram: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Furthermore, the value of an individual contract with a supplier is agreed in confidence and could be disclosed only with the prior agreement of all contractors involved. Figures are, however, available for the total number of contracts placed by the Defence Communications Services Agency since 2001 and the cumulative values of those contracts as well as the number of contract amendments (including extensions, additions to services provided etc.) to existing contracts made in the same period. The values are shown in the table:

	2001–02	*2002–03*
New contracts placed (number)	2,079	1,075
Value (£ million)	27.82	50.61
Contract amendments (number)	291	83
Value (£ million)	47.3	119.37

Judicial Committee of the Privy Council

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he had with *(a)* the Prime Minister and *(b)* military legal authorities on the Government's plans to change the legal responsibilities of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council as a court of appeal for the Sovereign Base Area of Akrotiri on Cyprus. [126774]

Mr. Ingram: No discussions have taken place. A consultation paper entitled "Constitutional Reform: A supreme Court for the United Kingdom" (Paper No 11/03) makes clear that the Government's current intention is that the Privy Council will be retained in its current form as regards its functions as a final court of appeal from certain colonies and overseas territories.

Media Training

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was to his Department of media and voice training for ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [123120]

Mr. Caplin: A search of the available records indicates that no Ministers within the Ministry of Defence have undertaken either media or voice training during the years referred to in the question.

Records are not kept centrally of the costs of training in media and voice training for MOD officials and this could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Medical Care (Waiting Lists)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the waiting list targets for the *(a)* Defence Secondary Care Agency and *(b)* Ministry of Defence Hospital Units; and what progress in meeting these targets has been achieved. [121368]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 30 June 2003]:* The waiting time targets set by the Defence Secondary Care Agency (DSCA) for 2002–03 for first out-patient appointment and for in-patient and day-case treatment, and the achievement against them, first, by the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine (RCDM), the MOD Hospital Units (MDHUs) and the Royal Surrey County Hospital only and, second, by all DSCA units, are set out in the following table. The Royal Surrey County Hospital has been included because it provides oromaxillofacial treatment under similar arrangements to those at the MDHUs.

Percentages

Waiting time target	*45 per cent. of patients to be offered first out-patient appointment within four weeks of referral*	*90 per cent. of patients to be offered first out-patient appointment within 13 weeks of referral*
Average waiting time achieved by all DSCA units	53	90

Inpatient and Day case waiting time target and achievement.

Percentages

Waiting time target	*80 per cent. of patients to be offered a treatment date within 13 weeks of the decision to admit the patient*
Average waiting time achieved by RCDM, MDHUs and Royal Surrey County Hospital (for oromaxillofacial treatment only)	77
Average waiting time achieved by all DSCA units	83

Overall, the figures reflect small annual improvements in meeting waiting time targets.

The DSCA was disbanded on 31 March 2003, when responsibility for secondary health care commissioning and performance management passed to the Defence Medical Services Department. The same in-patient and out-patient waiting time targets apply for 2003–04, but information on the first quarter's achievement is not yet available.

Military Displays

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what major military displays and tattoos will be taking place this year involving HM forces in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [126138]

Mr. Caplin: The major military displays and tattoos in the United Kingdom which involve the armed forces for the year 2003 are in the following table. In addition to these there are numerous other Open Days, Family Days, and similar events across all three Services.

Event	*Dates*	*Location*
RNR Centenary Parade	8 March	Glasgow
Battle of the Atlantic 60th Anniversary commemoration	30 April to 6 May	Liverpool
RNR Centenary Parade	17 May	London
International Festival of the Sea (IFOS)	23–26 May	Leith, Edinburgh
Beating Retreat (Household Division)	27–28 May	London
Queen's Birthday Parade (Trooping the Colour)	14 June	London
Royal International Air Tattoo[1]	18–20 July	RAF Fairford, Glocs
Presentation of new Queen's Colour to the Fleet	23 July	Plymouth
RAF Waddington At Home Day	28–29 July	RAF Waddington, Lincs
Edinburgh Military Tattoo	1–23 August	Edinburgh
RAF Leuchars Battle of Britain At Home Day	13 September	RAF Leuchars, Fife
Iraq memorial service	10 October	London
Lord Mayor's Show	8 November	London
Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance	8 November	London
Remembrance Sunday ceremonies	9 November	London and across the country

[1] On 25 October 1999, the Secretary of State for Defence announced in Parliament events that were to replace the Royal Tournament—the Defence 2000 series—25 October 1999, *Official Report*, columns 696–97. The Defence 2003 exhibition, under the leadership of the Royal Air Force, which was scheduled to take place at the Royal International Air Tattoo (RIAT) at RAF Fairford from 18 to 20 July, has been postponed by 12 months because of recent operational pressures. The RIAT itself will, however, go ahead as planned, with significant participation by RAF aircraft.

Missile Defence Memorandum of Understanding

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment has been made of the potential value of contracts resulting from the missile defence memorandum of understanding signed on 12 June; which bodies have carried out analyses for the Department; and what values were estimated; [127047]

(2) what contracts have been signed by UK-based companies or institutions under the missile defence memorandum of understanding signed on 12 June. [127049]

Mr. Hoon: The Framework Ballistic Missile Defence Memorandum of Understanding (BMD MoU) signed on 12 June 2003 sets out the overarching structure for government-to-government collaboration between the United Kingdom and the United States on missile defence. It establishes and defines a framework within which specific activities, to be set out in Annexes to this MoU, can beundertaken. This includes activities already under way under the pre-existingStrategic Defence Initiative MoU. The BMD MoU itself provides no authorityfor placing contracts and no assessments were undertaken of the potential value of contracts resulting from collaborative projects that are in progress now, or may be undertaken in the future.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the companies involved in negotiations over the missile defence memorandum of understanding signed on 12 June; and at which point in the negotiation process each company was involved. [127048]

Mr. Hoon: No companies were involved in negotiations over the Ballistic Missile Defence Memorandum of Understanding signed on 12 June.

Operation Telic

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when investigations into friendly fire incidents during Operation Telic will be completed; and if he will make a statement. [122154]

Mr. Ingram: Thorough investigations are continuing into all such incidents. In conducting our own investigations into incidents of fratricide during the conflict we will of course carefully consider all relevant information as part of our effort to lessen the chance of such incidents occurring in the future. It would be inappropriate to comment on the conduct of our inquiries until such time as the outcomes are known and the content has been properly assessed.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the dates for ends of tours of duty in Operation Telic for *(a)* regular forces and *(b)* Reservists and Territorial Army serving in the same unit. [125967]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* On the completion of the combat phase of the campaign in Iraq, units which had a role in the stabilisation and rebuilding phase remained in theatre. Reservists serving with those units remained with them. Units which did not have a role in the stabilisation and reconstruction phase returned to the United Kingdom and, in the main, the reservists attached to them returned with their units; however, some reservists from these units with scarce and badly-needed skills were re-deployed to other units in theatre which had shortfalls.

Regular members of two units, 33 and 34 field hospitals, returned to the UK shortly after the cessation of hostilities in order to take on another operational role and for a period of leave before re-deploying back to theatre. Reservists who were attached to 34 field hospital, and had skills required for the continuing operations, remained in theatre to complete up to six months' deployment.

Reservists called out for the current operations in Iraq have been advised that their deployments will be for up to six months; the end of tour date for their units has not yet been decided but is unlikely to be more than six months after deployment. The expectation is that all reservists will return with their regular units.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Navy vessels were deployed in escorting duties during Operation Telic; and at which choke points and known threat areas they were stationed. [126098]

Mr. Ingram: Outside the Joint Operational Area HMS Westminster and HMS Cornwall provided escort duties in the Straits of Gibraltar on rotation with the vessels of other nations. The NATO Standing Naval Force Atlantic and Standing Naval Force Mediterranean undertook escorting duties in the Eastern Mediterranean. Within the Joint Operational Area, force protection was provided by the host nation in the Suez canal and non United Kingdom coalition assets in the Straits of Hormuz and Bab Al Mandeb.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what political advisers were deployed on Operation Telic; to which commanders they were assigned; and when they were *(a)* sent to and *(b)* withdrawn from theatre. [126101]

Mr. Ingram: Political advisers are deployed with United Kingdom forces to support the Commanders' decision making process with policy and political advice. They are Ministry of Defence officials and are able to draw on the expertise both from within the Ministry of Defence and across Government when providing advice. Political advisers were provided to the majority of component commanders during Operation Telic.

I am withholding details of the individuals under Exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent reports he has received from US authorities in respect of friendly fire incidents involving UK forces during Operation Telic; whether US investigations involving British forces are complete; and what assessment he has made of these reports. [126134]

Mr. Ingram: No such reports have yet been received. In conducting our own investigations into incidents of fratricide during the conflict we will of course carefully consider all relevant information as part of our effort to lessen the chance of such incidents occurring in the future. It would be inappropriate to comment on the conduct of our enquiries until such time as the outcomes are known and the content has been properly assessed.

Pay 2000 Computer System

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* regular service personnel and *(b)* reservists have been affected by delays in payment of salaries, bounty and compensation; and if he will make a statement. [118285]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 12 June 2003]:* We are not aware of any disruption or delays to the payment of salaries and other payments to members of the Regular Armed Services or mobilised reserve from the Royal Navy, Royal Marines or Royal Air Force as a result of Operation Telic. In my answer to the hon Member on 14 July 2003 *Official Report*, column 65W, I did recognise that some problems with Army pay had occurred associated with Pay 2000.

We are aware that difficulties over pay or allowances were experienced by a small number of Territorial Army personnel during their period of mobilisation. In most instances, these were the result of administrative delays in the processing and passing of key information to the Army Pay computer systems. Reports from units indicate that a small number of reservists had a short delay before payment of their Reservists' Hardship Allowance and Reservists' Standard Award because the paperwork had to be manually assessed and there were some instances of incomplete or missing paperwork.

For entitled mobilised TA personnel we are not aware of a delay in the payment of any entitled annual bounty, but pay statements detailing bounty payments are sent to the TA unit rather than the unit on which the mobilised reservists serves. As such there may have been delays in notification of the payment but not in the payment itself.

A lessons learned exercise is underway to ensure that where difficulties have occurred they are addressed in any future operations.

Phoenix Unmanned Aerial Vehicle

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flying hours were flown in total by Phoenix unmanned aerial vehicles in Iraq. [123549]

Mr. Ingram: To date 122 operational missions have been flown by Phoenix in support of Operation Telic, but the number of hours flown for these missions was not recorded centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Pilot Training

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* RAF, *(b)* Fleet Air Arm and *(c)* Army personnel have completed training for (i) Fast Jet, (ii) rotary and (iii) multi-engine aircraft types in each of the past five years. [126143]

Mr. Ingram: The number of personnel who have completed training in each of the last five years is:

RAF[1]

	Fast Jet (FJ)	*Rotary Wing (RW)*	*Multi-engine (ME)*
1998–99	55	36	53
1999–2000	53	41	63
2000–01	55	44	66
2001–02	76	28	42
2002–03	73	42	62

[1] These figures include all officer aircrew including pilots and weapon systems officers. They do not include non-commissioned aircrew, as these cannot be broken down by aircraft type.

Fleet Air Arm[2]

	Fast Jet (FJ)	*Rotary Wing (RW)*
1998–99	4	46
1999–2000	4	45
2000–01	3	57
2001–02	9	64
2002–03	7	60

[2] These figures include all Royal Navy aircrew including pilots, observers and aircrewmen.

Army[3]

	Rotary Wing (RW)
1998–99	72
1999–2000	71
2000–01	59
2001–02	34
2002–03	46

[3] These figures include all personnel who passed the Joint Elementary Training System Army Pilot Course.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the requirement has been for trained pilots for all three services in each year since 1996–97; and how many trained pilots have entered the services in those years. [126145]

Mr. Ingram: The requirement for trained pilots for all three services and the numbers entering the Services since 1996–97 are as follows:

	Requirement[1]	*Gains to trained strength (GTS)*[2]
RAF		
1997–98	133	100
1998–99	133	110
1999–2000	133	135
1900–01	138	133
1901–02	138	121
1902–03	145	159
Royal Navy		
1997–98	36	24
1998–99	42	29
1999–2000	42	29
2000–01	42	34
2001–02	46	46
2002–03	44	43
Army[3]		
1999	74	72
2000	75	71
2001	61	59
2002	56	[4]34

[1] Requirement is defined as pilots completing a full course of training including operational Conversion Unit.

[2] GTS figures include newly trained pilots and transfers from other Services and countries.

[3] Figures before 1999 are not readily available due to changes in the Training programme associated with the formation of the Joint Helicopter Command.

[4] Training courses were affected by the Foot and Mouth epidemic

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the strength of qualified flying instructors has been in each year since 1997–98. [126147]

Mr. Ingram: The following table details the strength of RAF qualified flying instructors:

	Strength
1997	828
1998	764
1999	705
2000	701
2001	660
2002	637
2003	626

The following table gives the strength of Army qualified flying instructors.

	Strength
1997	3
1998	5
1999	5
2000	6
2001	8
2002	9
2003	8

The Royal Navy currently has 167 flying instructors. Historical figures are not readily available.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on *(a)* initial and *(b)* operational pilot training in each year since 1996–97. [126144]

Mr. Caplin: The table shows the cost of initial pilot training in each year since 1999–2000 on an outturn basis. Resource accounting was introduced in 1999–2000 and no comparative figures are available prior to this. It has not been possible to provide the costs of operational pilot training, as the information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

£ million

Financial year	*Phase 1*	*Phase 2*	*Total*
1999–2000	3.074	194.123	197.197
2000–01	3.298	196.656	199.954
2001–02	3.219	195.773	198.992
2002–03	3.256	226.306	[1]229.562

[1] The effects of the Quinquennial Review on Tangible Assets have affected the costs of flying training in FY 2002–03.

RAF Lyneham

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* economic and *(b)* environmental impact studies were carried out into the effects of the closure of RAF Lyneham; and if he will publish them. [126363]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* An environmental and sustainability appraisal was undertaken by the RAF in relation to the Strategic Review for RAF Lyneham, RAF Brize Norton and RAF St. Mawgan. In addition, the Ministry of Defence's Directorate of Economic Advice produced an assessment of the economic impact of a decision to close RAF Lyneham. A copy of these documents will be placed in the Library of the House. A regional impact assessment was carried out in relation to the Strategic Review which included an assessment of the socio-economic effects of the various options being considered by the Review. This information is being withheld under Exemption 7 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Regulatory Bodies

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* number of staff employed by and *(b)* budget of each regulatory body for which his Department is responsible in each year since 1997. [117781]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence sets, monitors and enforces a large number of internal regulations. The Ministry of Defence is not responsible for any outward-facing regulatory bodies.

Royal Anglian Regiment

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the authorised strength of each battalion of the Royal Anglian Regiment is; and how many vacancies there are. [126212]

Mr. Caplin: The authorised strength (Establishment), actual strength and the deficit of each battalion of the Royal Anglian Regiment is detailed in the table.

	Establishment	*Strength*	*Deficit*	*Establishment*	*Strength*	*Deficit*
		1 R Anglian			*2 R Anglian*	
Infantry	585	560	25	555	515	40
Others[1]	80	60	20	60	55	5
UKTAP[2]	665	620	45	615	570	45

[1] Personnel attached to the Royal Anglian Regiment
[2] United Kingdom Trained Adult Personnel

Scottish Regiments

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Scottish regiments; what their authorised strength is; and how many vacancies there are. [126213]

Mr. Caplin: Details of the Scottish regiments, their authorised strength (Establishment), actual strength and manning deficit, are given in the following table.

	Establishment	*Strength*	*Deficit*	*Establishment*	*Strength*	*Deficit*
	Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders			*1 Black Watch*		
UKTAP[1]	625	575	50	745	645	100
Whole Army Strength	625	575	50	745	645	100
	1 Highlanders			*1 Kings Own Scottish Borderers*		
UKTAP[1]	625	520	105	665	630	35
Gurkhas	0	110	-110			
Total	625	630	-5	665	630	35
	1 Royal Highland Fusiliers			*1 Royal Scots*		
UKTAP[1]	620	540	80	620	525	95
Total	620	540	80	620	525	95
	Scots Guards			*F Coy Scots Guards*		
UKTAP[1]	625	565	60	110	115	-5
Total	625	565	60	110	115	-5

[1] UK Trained Adult Personnel—Includes personnel from other Corps attached to the Regiments.

Secondments

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel from *(a)* 15 Squadron, *(b)* 16 Squadron, *(c)* 20 Squadron and *(d)* 56 Squadron have been seconded to other squadrons to take part in operations in the past five years. [126149]

Mr. Caplin: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Suicide and Self-harm

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* suicides and *(b)* attempted suicides there were in military prisons in each year since 1990 by (i) members of the armed forces and (ii) members of the armed forces in custody awaiting trial; and how many serious self mutilations and injuries there were amongst members of the armed forces awaiting custodial sentences over the same period. [120512]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 25 June 2003]:* Armed Forces personnel who are found guilty of criminal charges requiring imprisonment are detained within Her Majesty's Prisons. There are no separate "military prisons". However, detention facilities are available at guardrooms in units and establishments in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the world. When it is necessary to hold an individual in custody pending their trial or sentencing, they are usually held at a local detention facility. An average of around 1,000 personnel per year have been held at the Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC) in Colchester. The following table gives the number of attempted suicides, suicides, and incidents of self harm of members of the armed forces either in custody or awaiting a custodial sentence at the MCTC in Colchester. Information on members of the Armed Forces held in custody elsewhere is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Year	Members of the armed forces in custody		Members of the armed forces awaiting custodial sentence		
	Attempted Suicide	Suicide	Attempted Suicide	Suicide	Self Harm
2003	0	0	0	0	0
2002	2	0	0	0	0
2001	1	0	0	0	1
2000	0	0	0	1	0
1999	2	0	0	0	0
1998	0	0	0	1	0
1997	0	0	0	0	0
1996	1	0	0	0	0
1995	0	0	0	0	0
1994	0	0	0	0	0
1993	0	0	0	0	0
1992	0	0	0	0	0
1991	0	0	0	0	0
1990	0	0	0	0	0
Total	6	0	0	2	1

Training Group Defence Agency

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what efficiency savings have been achieved by the Training Group Defence Agency in each year since 1998–99. [126146]

Mr. Caplin: Efficiency targets for the Training Group Defence Agency (TGDA) were set as input targets for the years prior to Financial Year 2002–03. Achievement was £20.354 million in FY 1999–2000 and £6.441 million in Financial Year 2000–01.

In Financial Year 2002–03 efficiency targets and measurements were presented to and approved by the PSX, which enabled the efficiency PSA to be expressed in output terms. The target for Financial Year 2002–03 was to reduce the average cost of a trainee to £180,560. This was achieved.

Following the QQR and associated revaluations of assets, which would distort absolute figures, the definition of efficiency was reviewed and restated as a percentage reduction compared with the initial baseline set as the outturn from Financial Year 2000–01. This declared mat TGDA would achieve a 0.75 per cent. per annum reduction in the average cost of a recruit graduating from initial specialist training.

In Financial Year 2002–03, TGDA met the 0.75 per cent. target and believe that they have achieved a slightly greater reduction that the target set. This will be validated once year end accounts are completed.

War Graves

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the state of British war graves in South Africa; and if he will increase the MOD's contribution to the upkeep of the graves; [125942]

(2) what discussions his Department has had with *(a)* the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and *(b)* the Adjutant General's Office concerning funding for the upkeep of British Boer war graves in South Africa; [125943]

(3) what recent discussions he has had with the South African government regarding funding for the maintenance of British war graves in South Africa; [125944]

(4) further to his answers of 20 May 2003, *Official Report*, column 673W, and of 23 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 539W, on the Boer War, whether the contributions made by the Government to the South African Heritage Resources Agency have been suspended. [126060]

Mr. Caplin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 23 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 539W. The Adjutant-General, who is responsible for pre-1900 British war graves, earlier this year funded a study by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission into the costs of restoring and maintaining those graves in South Africa. This report is currently under consideration and consequently no discussions have yet taken place with the South African authorities.

Any proposal to change the amount made in the annual donation to the South African Heritage Resource Agency from the present level of £15,000 will be considered in the context of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission report.

This money is administered by our Defence Attaché in Pretoria and allocated to specific projects before being passed to the relevant South African agency.

HEALTH

Food Supplements

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the expected cost to industry is of the Food Supplements Regulations (England) 2003; how many food supplements and nutrients are to be removed from sale as a result of the regulations; and what assessment her Department has made of British manufacturers' and retailers' representations on the regulations. [121909]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The United Kingdom has no choice but to implement the Food Supplements Directive in order to fulfil its obligations under the European Community treaty. The Food Supplements (England) Regulations 2003 take full advantage of all the flexibility available to member states in implementing the legislation, which has been welcomed by British manufacturers and retailers of food supplements.

The costs to the British food supplements industry will result from mandatory new labelling requirements in the Directive, from reformulation of products where necessary, from dossier preparation where industry chooses to do this and from possible future loss of products from the market. The Government's assessment of the costs associated with implementing the Directive, including those due to removal of products from sale, are set out in the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). Copies have been placed in the Library.

The Food Standards Agency does not hold information about the numbers of food supplement products on the UK market. According to information provided by industry, Annex I of the Food Supplements Directive excludes from use six minerals that are currently used in products marketed in the UK and around 300 chemical forms of vitamins and minerals currently used in products on the UK market are not

included in Annex II. However, these may continue to be used in food supplements after 1 August 2005 provided the criteria in Article 4(6) of the Directive are met.

Many groups have expressed concerns about the potential impact of the Directive, and hence the implementing Regulations, on the UK market. The Government understand these concerns, many of which are also set out in the RIA. Given anxieties about the cost of dossier production and the timescale for dossier submission, the need for a meeting with European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to discuss requirements for dossier content has now been agreed, following representations from the Food Standards Agency. The EFSA and relevant parties will meet to discuss the potential for simplified dossiers. The European Commission supports this move.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implications for *(a)* specialist manufacturers, *(b)* specialist retailers and *(c)* consumer choice of the requirement to remove from the market nutrients and nutrient sources which are not listed as acceptable for such use in the Schedules to the proposed Food Supplements (England) Regulations 2003. [124161]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The United Kingdom has no choice but to implement the Food Supplements Directive in order to fulfil its obligations under the European Community treaty. The Food Supplements (England) Regulations 2003 take full advantage of all the flexibility available to member states in implementing the legislation.

The Government recognise that some products may be lost from the UK market from 1 August 2005 because of restrictions on nutrient sources which will apply from that date. However, it is not yet possible to fully assess the implications of the Directive for specialist manufacturers, retailers and for consumer choice since these will depend upon future developments on lists of permitted nutrients and nutrient sources and on maximum limits for vitamin and minerals in food supplements.

Sheltered Housing

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance is given to old age pensioners moving from their house to a sheltered home; and what proposals he has to ensure that older people are able to remain in their own houses if they wish. [124053]

Dr. Ladyman: I am replying in respect of service provision in England.

Provision of sheltered housing is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister.

Local "Better Care, Higher Standards" charters should provide comprehensive information for people with long-term care needs, including housing, as well as care options.

As part of the Department of Health's Public Service Agreement, we are committed to improve the quality of life and independence of older people so that they can live at home wherever possible. We aim to increase the number of those supported intensively to live at home to 30 per cent. of the total being supported by social services at home or in residential care by March 2006.

The Priorities and Planning Framework 2003–06 assumes an increase of 6,900 extra care housing places between 1997 and 2006.

Disabled Access

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of GP surgeries located within the London borough of Hillingdon provide access for disabled patients. [126736]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not held centrally. Information from Hillingdon Primary Care Trust is that out of 52 surgeries, 45 practices provide full disabled access for disabled patients.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists providing NHS treatment are located within the London borough of Hillingdon; and how many provide access for disabled patients. [126737]

Mr. Hutton: The total number of dentists within the Hillingdon Primary Care Trust is 100. This figure is rounded to the nearest 10 and includes general dental, community dental and hospital dental services. Information regarding access for disabled patients is not held centrally. Information from Hillingdon PCT is that out of 41 practices, 25 dentists' surgeries provide full access for disabled patients.

Allergies

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to hold a detailed analysis of the causes of the increase in allergies. [124223]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department of Health is currently doing no analysis into the increase of different types of allergy. We are aware that allergic disease is one of the major causes of illness in the developed world and that incidence is on the increase. A range of research projects on the epidemiology of allergies, however, have recently been completed or are still on-going.

The International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood (ISAAC) was formed in 1991. Phase One measured the prevalence of childhood asthma, hayfever and atopic eczema for international comparisons. Phase Two began in 1998 and involves more intensive studies in a smaller number of countries. The Department of Health funded the UK contribution to Phase Two.

The Food Standards Agency is currently funding a £0.5 million project which aims to establish how common food allergy is among children between birth and 15 years of age. King's College London is leading a £2.1 million EU-funded prospective study of the incidence and prognosis of allergy, allergic disease and low lung function in adults living in Europe.

The University of Manchester is leading a £1.2 million EU-funded investigation of the prevalence, pathogenesis, treatment and prevention of sun allergy across Europe. Sun-provoked skin reactions are one of the commonest forms of allergy.

A recent report from the Royal College of Physicians called 'Allergy the Unmet Need, A Blueprint for Better Patient Care' noted that allergies including asthma, rhinitis, eczema, food allergy and drug allergy are becoming increasingly common.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of a possible link between obesity and Alzheimer's disease. [126840]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department has not assessed the possible link between obesity and Alzheimer's disease.

The key message of the Alzheimer's Society Alzheimer's Awareness Week was that there are steps that can be taken that might minimise the risk of developing dementia in later life. The Alzheimer's Society considers it helpful to reduce intake of salt and saturated fat and try to lower any high blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Anti-TNF Therapy

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many primary care trusts made anti-TNF therapy available to patients in the last year for which figures are available; and what funding is available to primary care trusts to enable them to implement National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidelines on anti-TNF therapy. [126863]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on the number of primary care trusts (PCTs) making anti-TNF therapy available to patients is not collected centrally. Funding to meet the recommendations of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence has been included in the allocations made to PCTs over the period 2003–04 to 2005–06.

Antipsychotic Medication

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions were issued in each of the last five years for *(a)* atypical, *(b)* traditional and *(c)* all antipsychotic medication in each region and health authority for age groups (i) 0 to 15 years, (ii) 16 to 59 years and (iii) 60 years and over. [126841]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information on the numbers of prescription items for traditional and atypical antipsychotic drugs dispensed in the community broken down by broad age groups for years that the Department holds comparable data, has been placed in the Library.

Ashworth Special Hospital

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each staff vacancy in Ashworth Special Hospital, indicating how long each post has been vacant. [123557]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The national health service survey is conducted in March each year. The most recent figures currently available are from the March 2002 survey and show vacancies which have remained unfilled for three months or over in Ashworth Special Hospital as follows:

All consultants:1

Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff: 1

Results from the NHS vacancy survey can be accessed over the internet at www.doh.gov.uk/public/vacancysurvey.htm

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implications of the recent media coverage linking asylum seekers with the spread of HIV. [125959]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* We do not comment on the implications of media coverage.

The Department of Health keeps the issues of asylum seekers and HIV under constant review.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to amend the Government's policy on screening for breast cancer. [126994]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organisation evaluated the evidence on breast cancer screening and concluded that trials have provided sufficient evidence for the efficacy of mammography screening of women between 50 and 69 years, and that the reduction in mortality from breast cancer among women who chose to participate in screening programmes was estimated to be about 35 per cent.

The Advisory Committee on Breast Cancer Screening monitors the effectiveness of the National Health Service Breast Screening Programme and advises on how the screening programme should be amended.

On the advice of the committee the National Health Service Breast Screening Programme is being extended to women aged up to 70 and to upgrade the programme by introducing two-view mammography at all screening rounds, this will be completed by 2004.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 10 July 2003 to the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton), *Official Report*, column 1001W, on breast cancer, what the baseline is against which his Department is measuring its progress on age discrimination; and what measurable changes have been achieved to date. [126341]

Dr. Ladyman: Figures published in the "National Service Framework for Older People: A Report of Progress and Future Challenges", in March 2003 showed that, between 2000 and 2002, breast cancer surgery for patients aged 85 and over rose by 13 per cent.

Source:

Hospitals Episode Statistics—Department of Health.

Cancer Treatment

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve the treatment of less common cancers in the NHS. [127017]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The NHS Plan set out the intention to make available authoritative guidance on all aspects of National Health Service Cancer Care. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) was therefore asked to build on the existing cancer service guidance programme, established following the publication of the Calman-Hine report in 1995, by commissioning a comprehensive package of guidance for cancer services covering all cancers.

The guidance programme initially focused on the three commonest forms of cancer (breast, colorectal and lung cancer). Subsequent reports have focused on groups of cancer (gynaecological, upper gastro-intestinal and urological) which taken together account for substantial numbers of cases, but which may individually be relatively uncommon.

A report on haematological cancers is due to be published shortly. Guidance covering other rarer cancers, including sarcoma, head and neck, brain and central nervous system and skin cancers, along with child and adolescent cancers are also planned.

In addition to the 'Improving Outcomes' series of guidance, NICE has appraised or are appraising, a number of chemotherapy drugs, including drugs for less common cancers such as gemcitabine for pancreatic cancer and glivec for gastro intestinal stromal tumours.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what drugs are being used and being tested in the treatment of *(a)* childhood acute lymphoblastic leukaemia, *(b)* acute myelogenous leukemia, *(c)* chronic lymphocytic leukemia, *(d)* esophageal cancer, *(e)* osteosarcoma, *(f)* pancreatic cancer, *(g)* retinoblastoma, *(h)* sarcoma, *(i)* stomach cancer, *(j)* thyroid cancer and *(k)* Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia. [127021]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information on drugs currently licensed for the treatment of acute lymphoblastic leukaemia, acute myelogenous leukemia, chronic lymphocytic leukemia, esophageal cancer, osteosarcoma, pancreatic cancer, sarcoma, stomach cancer, thyroid cancer and Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia, has been placed in the Library.

There are no drugs specifically licensed for the treatment of childhood acute lymphoblastic leukaemia or of retinoblastoma, also a cancer of childhood. Decisions on the drugs used to treat these cancers will a matter for the individual clinicians and funding authorities concerned.

The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulation Agency (MHRA) is the competent authority for medical devices and the licensing authority for pharmaceuticals and one of its key activities is the regulation of clinical trials. However, MHRA are not able to provide details regarding products in clinical trials as information is provided to MHRA in confidence and cannot be disclosed.

Cardiology Services

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on routine follow-up tests for people who have suffered heart attacks and suspected heart attacks; and if he will make a statement. [126007]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Provision for cardiac rehabilitation is addressed in Standard 12 of the national service framework (NSF) for coronary heart disease. This states:

> "National Health Service trusts should put in place agreed protocols/systems of care so that, prior to leaving hospital, people admitted to hospital suffering from coronary heart disease have been invited to participate in a multidisciplinary programme of secondary prevention and cardiac rehabilitation. The aim of the programme will be to reduce their risk of subsequent cardiac problems and to promote their return to a full and normal life."

Service models for the delivery of this standard are set out in the NSF.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to reduce waiting times for cardiology appointments; and if he will make a statement. [126008]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Rapid access chest pain clinics (RACPCs), supported by clear referral criteria and protocols for investigation, can provide rapid diagnosis and assessment of people with suspected angina.

There is now a RACPC in every acute trust in England, working to ensure that all patients are seen within two weeks of a general practitioner referral.

For other cardiologist referrals, the Coronary Heart Disease Collaborative is working with local health services to support them in reducing waiting times.

Care Standards

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the effect of standard 31.7, within the National Minimum Standards of Care, on the ability of volunteers to assist with lifting the elderly. [125644]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 14 July 2003]:* I believe this question refers to standard 31.7 of the care homes for adults (18 to 65) standards, which says that volunteers should supplement and not replace paid staff and that volunteers should not undertake tasks which are the responsibility of paid staff. The equivalent standard in the care homes for older people standards is 36.5.

The intention of these standards is to ensure that volunteers are not used to enable a care home to avoid employing suitably qualified, competent and experienced staff in numbers appropriate to meet the assessed needs of the residents. There is no intention in either standard to prevent volunteers assisting with lifting residents in the care home where this is appropriate and subject to the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 being taken into account.

Chloramine

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the letter of 1 July, ref PO 103 0668, what action he is taking to change guidelines at public swimming pools in relation to chloramine being a possible cause of asthma. [126270]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 17 July 2003]:* My letter of 1 July referred to a paper published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* on

28 May which suggested that chloramine, a cleansing agent used in swimming pools, may be a cause of asthma.

The Department of Health Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP) plan to write to the journal raising a number of technical issues. A statement from COMEAP will also be prepared. These can be used to help the Health and Safety Executive judge whether there is any need to change guidelines to swimming pools at this stage.

CJD

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish an update to the Department's interim report on the vCJD's Incidents Panel's consultation document, 'Management of Possible Exposure to CJD Through Medical Procedures'. [123377]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have endorsed the majority of the proposed advice set out in the CJD Incidents Panel Framework document, as revised following a public consultation. However, the CMOs have advised that the proposed establishment, without informed consent, of a database of patients possibly exposed to the CJD agent, required wider debate.

The CMOs have informed the panel of their view and requested that the panel amend its framework document to indicate that this part of the document has not yet been agreed. The Department of Health will publish the framework document once the panel has responded to this request. Publication is anticipated during the autumn.

All documents relating to the work of the CJD Incidents are published on the CJD Incidents Panel page of the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/cjd/incidentspanel.

Consultants' Contract

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the Central Consultants and Specialists Committee of the British Medical Association to discuss the Government's proposals for a consultants' contract; and if he will make a statement. [125035]

Mr. Hutton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met representatives of the British Medical Association on 17 July 2003 when it was announced that talks had successfully concluded with an agreed way forward on the new consultant contract.

Donaldson Report

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Donaldson report into clinical negligence will be published. [126126]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I am pleased to confirm that on the 30 June 2003 we published Professor Sir Liam Donaldson's proposals for reform of the national health service clinical negligence system.

In his report, entitled "Making Amends", the Chief Medical Officer proposes a NHS redress scheme which would offer redress for injuries. The scheme would provide people who were injured with an explanation of what went wrong, the necessary apologies, treatment for that injury and support for patients and their families, as well as some financial compensation in appropriate cases. He also proposes that families of neurologically impaired babies would be eligible for the NHS redress scheme if the impairment was birth related and fulfilled other eligibility criteria.

The report is published for consultation and the consultation period will end on 17 October 2003. Following considerations of the issues raised and of the views of respondents on the specific questions asked, the Department of Health expects to set out the next steps to reform the clinical negligence system later this year or early in 2004.

Eating Disorders

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children suffered from anorexia in each year since 1997. [125092]

Dr. Ladyman: This information is not collected centrally. A survey carried out by the Office for National Statistics in 1999 found that the prevalence of eating disorders (including anorexia nervosa) among all children aged five to 15 was 0.1 per cent. and the rate for girls aged five to 15, 0.2 per cent.

Prescriptions

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been put in place for those doctors who were participating in the electronic transmission of prescriptions pilots to continue to be able to use the ETP system while the national model is under consideration. [127033]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are elements within the electronic transmission of prescriptions (ETP) systems that general practitioner practices that participated in the pilots could continue to use as part of the electronic prescribing process. This arrangement will likely to be subject to agreement between the practices and pilot consortia. It will not be possible however to transmit the prescription electronically using a GP's electronic signature as the temporary legislation to enable the ETP pilots to use electronic signatures was put in place for the pilots only. The Prescription Pricing Authority will continue to receive electronic prescriptions for payment processing until 30 September 2003 to ensure that patients who have signed up for the pilot do not experience difficulties in obtaining their prescriptions and that they are clear about the arrangements for receiving their medicines once ETP transmission has ceased. After 30 September 2003, participating GPs will revert to the manual process.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to introduce the national model for e-prescribing. [127034]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The National Programme for National Health Service Information Technology is considering a range of options for delivering a robust national model to deliver electronic transmission of prescriptions.

The Government remains committed to achieving the targets outlined in Delivering 21st Century IT Support for the NHS of a national prescription service, 50 per cent. of which will be implemented by the end of 2005, with all of it fully implemented by 2006–07.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make an assessment of the findings of the electronic transmission of prescriptions pilots. [127035]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The pilots have been independently evaluated by the Sowerby Centre for Health Informatics Newcastle. The draft evaluation reports are currently being reviewed by the Department of Health and will be finalised shortly. Among the key findings of the evaluation is that electronic transmission of prescriptions is technically viable and could provide a range of benefits including improved patient choice and safety.

Endometriosis

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce measures to help women suffering from endometriosis. [121247]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 2 July 2003]:* There are many measures already in place to help women who suffer from endometriosis. We are determined to improve the awareness of endometriosis and provide funding to the National Endometriosis Society, through the Section 64 general grants scheme towards their core activities. We are also providing £39,000 to the society to produce information leaflets. One leaflet is for women to encourage those with symptoms to discuss with their general practitioner and another is for GPs to highlight the symptoms so they can refer women for investigation and treatment.

We support GPs, knowing more about endometriosis. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence released a guide to the National Health Service in 2001 on appropriate referral practice. The referral advice covers eleven common conditions and has been developed as an educational resource for local health communities to develop their own local service guidelines. The advice is structured to provide clinical criteria on which to assess the urgency of referral across the range of conditions. Although endometriosis is not one of the conditions included in the advice, this might help give us an effective way of offering referral guidance to GPs on endometriosis among the range of other common conditions. We also want to see gynaecologists undertaking continuing professional development so they are kept abreast of the latest knowledge and best practice.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that *(a)* specialist care is available for endometriosis and *(b)* patient counsellors are available in (i) gynaecology wards and (ii) general practices. [124187]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government take endometriosis seriously and recognise that it affects the lives of many women and their families.

There are some specialist clinics that treat advanced cases of endometriosis, but these have been developed locally in response to need rather than being organised nationally. We would need better evidence of their effectiveness and cost effectiveness before considering a greater national role in establishing specialist centres.

Departmental officials met the National Endometriosis Society, to discuss issues about centres of excellence. I understand that they are intending to continue working together to whether further work might be appropriate.

We do not have any plans to introduce patient counsellors on gynaecological wards and general practice. The NHS University (NHSU) recognises the importance of good communication. The NHSU Induction and Communications Skills programme will be available to all staff joining the national health service on a roll out programme from October 2003. In addition, an advanced communication skills strategy is being offered initially to people working in the field of oncology, which again will be rolled out to other disciplines over time.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to provide further funding to enable research into endometriosis to progress. [124188]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Phil Sawford) today.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to issue guidelines to health professionals to ensure early diagnosis of endometriosis. [124190]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We recognise the importance of improving the awareness of endometriosis among health professionals, particularly general practitioners, with whom women with this condition will first come into contact. It is the role of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to produce clinical guidance rather than the Department of Health. NICE is undertaking a referral practice project on advice to general practitioners about referring common conditions, the results of which should give us an effective way of offering referral guidance to GPs on endometriosis and other common conditions.

The Department of Health is funding the National Endometriosis Society to produce information for GPs that will highlight the symptoms of endometriosis and encourage GPs to refer women appropriately for investigation and treatment.

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to promote and encourage research into endometriosis; and what Government funding is available. [124259]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The main Government agency for research into the causes and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC), which receives its funding from the Department for Trade and Industry via the Office of Science and Technology. In 2001–02 (the latest year for which a figure is available), the MRC spent £1.2 million on research on both endometriosis and the general physiology of the endometrium.

The MRC always welcomes high quality applications from the scientific community for support into any aspect of biomedical research and these are judged in open competition with other demands on funding.

The Department of Health funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the national health service. The Department also provides NHS support funding for research commissioned by the research councils and charities that takes place in the NHS. In the NHS, research priorities are identified through widespread consultation with those using, delivering and managing services. They take account of the burden of disease, potential benefits and departmental objectives, as well as the responsibilities and work of other research funders. As an outcome of these on-going processes, the Health Technology Assessment Programme recently published the report of a research project on the management of menorrhagia, which is sometimes associated with endometriosis. A research report on the diagnosis of endometrial abnormality is expected to be published in February 2004.

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to promote awareness of endometriosis among medical practitioners. [124260]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. George Osborne) on 1 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 228–29W.

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the number of women in England and Wales who *(a)* suffer from endometriosis and *(b)* receive treatment for endometriosis. [124261]

Miss Melanie Johnson: An estimated two million women in the United Kingdom suffer from endometriosis. Services to identify, advise and treat are widely available on the national health service. In 2001–02, there were 16,600 hospital episodes with a primary diagnosis of endometriosis. However, these are only the treatments that are recorded as procedures within a hospital setting and do not include all women with endometriosis.

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when *(a)* he and *(b)* his predecessors last met representatives of the (i) National Endometriosis Society and (ii) Simply Holistic Endometriosis Trust. [124262]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We acknowledge the role that voluntary organisations such as the National Endometriosis Society and the SHE Trust play in raising awareness of this condition and providing help and support to women. Officials at the Department of Health work closely with both the National Endometriosis Society and the SHE Trust.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears) spoke at an awareness seminar organised by the All Party Parliamentary Group on endometriosis of which the National Endometriosis Society and the Simply Holistic Endometriosis (SHE) are members, in April of this year.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to reduce the length of time before women with endometriosis are diagnosed. [125814]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Endometriosis is not always easy to diagnose. However, there are clear 'pointers' for it in cases of prolonged painful periods, painful penetrative sex and unexplained infertility. General practitioners should refer patients for early laparoscopy.

We are making funds available to the National Endometriosis Society to produce information leaflets that might help to reduce the time it takes for women to get an accurate diagnosis. One of these leaflets will be specifically for GPs to highlight the symptoms and encourage them to refer women for investigation and treatment. The other leaflet will be aimed at women encouraging those with symptoms to discuss the matter with their GP.

In addition, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence is undertaking a referral practice project on advice to GPs about referring common conditions, the results might give us an effective way of offering referral guidance to GPs on endometriosis among a range of other common conditions.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the Department's policies have been screened for their environmental impact since June 2001; how many environmental appraisals have been conducted, and on what policy issues; and what information has been published about these screenings and appraisals. [124714]

Miss Melanie Johnson: At present, the Department of Health does not keep a central record of environmental screenings and appraisals. However, departmental guidance on environmental policy appraisal (including a screening tool) is available to all staff on the departmental intranet. In raising staff awareness of sustainable development, attention has been drawn to the importance of carrying out environmental policy appraisals. This has also been drawn to the attention of agencies and arm's length bodies.

The Department has been one of the lead Departments in developing and piloting an integrated policy appraisal framework. This is a good practice tool designed to assess the impact—including environmental and health impacts—of policy proposals. The pilots are being evaluated centrally before decisions are taken on the framework's future role in policy making and joined up Government across Whitehall.

The Department's NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency introduced an environmental appraisal procedure into its ISO 14001 certified environmental management system in June 2002. This is available on the Agency's website at: http://www.pasa.nhs.uk

The Department's NHS Estates Agency has issued the NHS Environmental Assessment Tool (NEAT), which is bespoke software to be used by the national

health service to identify environmental impacts within the existing operational estate and of new builds and refurbishment.

Food Safety

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received regarding the importation of chicken and other poultry products from China. [126544]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) that the importation of chicken, poultry meat products and certain other products of animal origin from China for human consumption is currently prohibited under European Union legislation. The FSA has not received recent representations on this matter.

Food Supplements Directive

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the Food Supplements Directive on employment in the food supplement industry. [124901]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It is not yet possible to assess the implications of the Directive for jobs in the food supplement industry. Any impact of the Directive upon jobs will depend upon future developments on lists of permitted vitamins and minerals and their sources and on maximum limits for vitamin and minerals in food supplements, and the nature of the future market for food supplements.

The Government's assessment of the costs associated with implementing the Directive is set out in the Regulatory Impact Assessment. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Foundation Trusts

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish the source book on good governance for foundation trusts, produced by the external reference group; and if he will make a statement. [125033]

Mr. Hutton: A source book is currently being developed to help NHS Foundation Trust applicants develop their governance arrangements. The first edition will be published shortly and will be supplemented, over time, to include learning from the experience of first-wave applicants. It has been put together by the Department of Health, drawing on a wide range of contributions from business, public and not for profit and mutual organisations.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional funds have been made available to each of the trusts applying for foundation status to contribute towards the cost of each of their applications. [126221]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* National health service trusts that have entered the preparatory stage for NHS foundation trust status have been given £100,000 to contribute to the costs of project managing for establishment as an NHS foundation trust. The Department of Health is also making available a wide ranging support package for applicants, which is designed to minimise the cost associated with the application.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the official risk assessment for the foundation hospital policy and for each applicant trust. [126222]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* Subject to legislation, copies of any application made to the Independent Regulator for authorisation as a national health service foundation trust will be publicly available. The application will contain information on, and analysis of, any risks associated with the application.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the independent financial assessment of each trust applying for foundation status. [126223]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* The process of independent financial assessment has not yet been undertaken.

Free Prescriptions (Students)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what circumstances full-time students are eligible for free prescriptions. [126778]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Full time students are entitled to free national health service prescriptions if they are aged under 19. Other full time students are entitled to free prescriptions if they hold a maternity or medical exemption certificate; are named on a Tax Credit NHS exemption certificate; or hold an NHS Low Income Scheme exemption certificate for full help.

Patients who pay charges and need frequent prescriptions may benefit from purchasing a prescription prepayment certificate.

General Medical Council

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met representatives of the General Medical Council. [127036]

Mr. Hutton: Since becoming Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend has not yet had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the General Medical Council.

However, my right hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) met representatives of the CMC on 20 May 2003.

GP Lists

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the average list size of GPs in England; what his Department sets as the *(a)* optimum and *(b)* maximum list size for a GP; and if he will make a statement. [126738]

Mr. Hutton: Data on the number of general practitioners and patients is published annually. The latest edition, "Statistics for General/Medical Practitioners in England: 1992–2002", is available at http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0303.pdf

These data show that on 30 September 2002 the average lists size was 1,838, or slightly more than half of the permitted maximum.

For GPs providing general medical services, the maximum list size is normally 3,500 but a GP may have up to 2,000 additional patients if he or she employs another GP-qualified doctor as an assistant.

The optimum list size will vary from practice to practice, reflecting local demographic and socio-economic factors, accessibility and patient choice among many other factors.

The average list size continues to fall, and is 4 per cent. lower in 2002 than it was in 1992.

Health Care Assistants

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the role of health care assistants in the NHS; whether he proposes to make changes to the role; and if he will make a statement. [126813]

Mr. Hutton: A wide range of jobs have the title of health care assistant. Traditionally, health care assistants have usually worked on hospital wards in support of nursing staff, or have supported community nurses. However, the role is increasingly being developed to provide support to all health and social care professions. Each post is designed locally to meet service needs, and is tailored to ensure the delivery of efficient, high quality care.

"Agenda for Change", the new national health service pay system, will allow health care assistant staff to be fairly rewarded for what they actually do on the basis of equal pay for work of equal value, rather than being paid on the basis of current job title.

Health Laboratories

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* public health laboratories and *(b)* NHS trust laboratories which have refused to provide microbiology services for food, water and environmental testing; and if he will make a statement. [125012]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We are aware of only one case where a former Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) laboratory in Nottingham could not accept samples of swimming pool water for microbiological testing. This has now been resolved.

We are not aware of any other public health or national health service laboratories which have refused to provide microbiology services for food, water and environmental testing. The transition of this service from the PHLS to the Health Protection Agency has been managed from the outset on a 'business as usual' basis.

Hearing Aids

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the waiting times for hearing aids in each of the primary care trusts in Devon. [125428]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 14 July 2003]:* The Department does not collect information on waiting times centrally for non consultant-led specialities such as audiology.

Hospitalisations (Cold)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elderly people were hospitalised as a result of cold in each *(a)* primary care trust and *(b)* acute trust in each year since 1997. [126348]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not collated centrally by primary care trust. The information for each national health service trust has been placed in the Library.

Hospital Star Ratings

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the financial implications are for the *(a)* South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust, *(b)* Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Trust and *(c)* Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust of the decision to award them one star status. [126960]

Dr. Ladyman: There are no direct financial penalties for National Health Service organisations awarded one star for their performance in 2002–03, although one-off capital bonus payments are reserved for three star organisations. One star organisations may receive assistance from the Modernisation Agency in the form of specific programmes of tailored support to help improve performance.

Human Tissue Act

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce legislation following the Government's review of the Human Tissue Act 1961. [127023]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government are committed to the introduction of new legislation on the retention and use of human organs and tissue following publication last year of the consultative report 'Human Bodies, Human Choices'. Legislation will be brought forward as soon as parliamentary time is available.

Independent Complaints Advocacy Service

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the key stages were in the commissioning of the independent complaints advocacy service due to commence on 1 September; and what the *(a)* planned and *(b)* actual date for completion of each stage was. [125807]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Standard Department of Health Procurement Procedures for a Category B—Residual Service (OJEC/OJEU exempt) were used to ensure a robust process. The key stages were:

1. the request for expressions of interest;
2. issuing the invitations to tender;
3. the evaluation of tenders and selection of preferred providers; and
4. award of contracts.

For each stage the planned (March 2003) and actual dates were:

1. 23 and 28 March;
2. 13 and 14 May;
3. 18 and 30 June; and
4. 7 July and 9 July.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 9 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 861W, how the feedback from the ICAS pilots was *(a)* collected and evaluated and *(b)* used to inform the ICAS system commissioned by the Department. [125818]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Feedback from the independent complaints advocacy service (ICAS) pilots has been collected in two ways. Statistical data were collected from the ICAS pilots on a quarterly basis and the information received from the second quarter provided information for tenderers of the new service on volumes of caseload broken down into levels of complexity of complaints. Qualitative analysis of regular ICAS pilots' reports and regional meetings of ICAS pilots informed the tender requirements by raising issues such as working to consistent national standards and the need for arrangements with specialist providers for complex casework. A final evaluation of the pilots is now under way and will build on feedback on issues such as relationships with national health service complaints and patient advocacy liaison services departments, as well as best ways for working with vulnerable groups. A final report will be published in October 2003 and will inform on-going service provision by the new ICAS providers as well as the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health with its role of monitoring the ICAS service.

International Nurse Mobility

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action the Government will take to address the findings of the study International Nurse Mobility: Trends and Policy Implications on England's reliance on nurses from overseas; [127012]

(2) if he will make a statement on the findings of the study International Nurse Mobility: Trends and Policy Implications published jointly by the World Health Organisation, the International Council of Nurses, and the Royal College of Nursing, UK on 28 June. [127013]

Mr. Hutton: As concluded in the study's findings, international recruitment is a short-term measure in helping alleviate the current workforce pressures in the national health service. Work continues in increasing the number of training places and encouraging healthcare professionals to return to the national health service through our "Improving Working Lives" initiatives and is proving to be successful.

The Department of Health is actively discouraging the NHS from recruiting healthcare workers from developing countries. We are unable to stop the movement of individuals wanting to work in the NHS. The code of practice produced for NHS employers discourages the NHS from actively recruiting from overseas and recent Nursing and Midwifery Council figures have indicated a levelling out of entrants from developing countries.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action he will take to address the point made in International Nurse Mobility: Trends and Policy Implications on England's development and retention of its own nurses; and if he will make a statement; [127014]

(2) what efforts the Government is making to diminish England's reliance on nurses from overseas, with particular reference to developing countries. [127015]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are committed to developing nurses in England through their national nursing strategy, 'Making a Difference'. A comprehensive programme of national and local action has been taking place. This will expand the workforce, strengthen education and training, provide a modern career framework and decent pay, improve the working and employment conditions of nurses, and develop their leadership skills and equip and empower them to take on new, expanded and more satisfying roles.

Accreditation to the Improving Working Lives (IWL) Standard is also creating well-managed, flexible working environments that support all staff and promotes their welfare and development, in and out of the work place. IWL sets a model of good human resource (HR) practice against which national health service employers and their staff can measure the organisation's HR management and against which all NHS employers are currently being kite-marked. It is also an integral part of the HR performance management process.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government has to make his Department's ethical guidelines in international nurse recruitment mandatory for all employers in *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* the independent sector. [127016]

Mr. Hutton: National health service employers involved in international recruitment are strongly commended to adhere to the code of practice.

We are currently in the process of strengthening the code of practice in consultation with our solicitors.

The Independent Healthcare Association has worked with the Department to produce a document "Guide for the Provision of Adaptation for Nurses in the in the Independent and National Health Service Sectors", which has been circulated across the public and private healthcare sectors.

Learning Disability Services

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total net expenditure of *(a)* learning disability social services and *(b)* social services in England was in each year since 1997–98 at 2001–02 prices; and what the total net expenditure of learning disability services was as a percentage of the total social services budget in those years. [126926]

Dr. Ladyman: The table shows the net expenditure by councils in England on personal social services for adults aged under 65 with learning disabilities, and their total net expenditure on personal social services, in cash and at 2001–02 prices, for the period 1997–98 to 2001–02. The table also shows, for the same period, the total budget for personal social services and the

percentage the net cash expenditure on services for adults under 65 with learning disabilities was of the total budget.

£ million

England	Cash terms: Personal social services net expenditure on adults under 65 with learning disabilities	Cash terms: Total personal social services net expenditure	Cash terms: Total personal social services budget	Percentage of budget spent on services for adults over 65 with learning disabilities
1997–98	1,132	8,454	7,923	14.3
1998–99	1,242	9,059	8,911	13.9
1999–2000	1,365	10,050	9,645	14.1
2000–01	1,465	10,696	10,254	14.3
2001–02	1,585	11,369	11,048	14.3

£ million

	2001–02 prices[1]: Personal social services net expenditure on adults under 65 with learning disabilities	2001–02 prices[1]: Total personal social services net expenditure
1997–98	1,249	9,323
1998–99	1,333	9,722
1999–2000	1,430	10,532
2000–01	1,502	10,959
2001–02	1,585	11,369

[1] Figures at 2001–02 prices have been calculated using GDP deflators.

Sources:

Expenditure, Form PSS EX1 (form RO3 prior to 2000–01)

Budgets:

ODPM RA forms

Maternity Services

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many midwives who completed training in each year since 1999 subsequently took up a post in midwifery in the NHS; [126995]

(2) how many midwives *(a)* were in training and *(b)* completed training in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [126996]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of midwives entering training each year since 1998–99 is shown in the table. Information on the number of midwives completing training and taking up posts in the national health service each year is not collected centrally.

Since 1998–99 there has been an increase of 371, or 21 per cent., midwives entering training each year. In the same period, the number of midwives employed in the NHS has increased by 410 to 23,249.

	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
Total	1,751	1,772	1,887	1,878	2,122
Diploma	597	620	604	525	724
Degree	255	395	494	621	721
Other	899	757	789	732	677

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) publishes an annual statistical report which includes information about the number of midwives registering each year, a requirement for employment in the NHS. This data can be found on the NMC website at www.nmc-uk.org.uk.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the findings of the maternity and neonatal workforces group. [123475]

Dr. Ladyman: The report of the Maternity and Neonatal Workforce Group was published on the Department of Health website in January 2003. The report's findings have been fed into the work of the children's national service framework.

Clinical Trials

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what impact the introduction of the Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) Regulations in May 2004 will have on trials of new treatment regimes carried out by researchers in hospitals and universities; and if he will make a statement on how the directive will be implemented in the UK. [126828]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The draft regulations are to transpose into United Kingdom law, Directive 2001/20/EC on approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the member states relating to implementation of good clinical practice in the conduct of clinical trials on medicinal products for human use. Consultation on the draft regulations closed on 16 May 2003. The Medical Research Council's (MRC) response is available in full on its website. Its assessment reflected the main concerns expressed by the charitable and public sector.

The Department of Health and the MRC have agreed jointly to lead a project to clarify the arrangements for publicly funded clinical trials involving medicines in the UK. It will draw up practical advice to enable publicly funded clinical trials involving medicines to comply with the law while making best use of existing good practice, minimising additional bureaucracy and making maximum use of public resources to avoid unnecessary expense.

The project is about to start, under the chairmanship of Professor Kent Woods, Director of the national health service health technology assessment programme. It will draw extensively on expert advice from trialists and from the charitable and public sector.

Member states are required to implement the Directive fully by 1 May 2004. I announced that the process of developing the regulations should be completed some time after Parliament reconvenes in October, with the aim of an update around that time.

Ministerial Meetings

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how often he met his counterparts in the devolved Administrations in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [126518]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Ministers in the Department of Health have regular meetings with Ministers from the devolved Administrations where various issues are discussed.

MRI Scanning (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of existing capacity for MRI scanning for NHS patients in the public and private sectors in Worcestershire; and if he will make a statement. [126961]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department of Health maintains a database to monitor the provision of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanners in the national health service, and the age of the machines installed. Allocation of MRI scanners has been made on the basis of improving access to MRI scanners across the NHS as a whole.

The Department of Health is aware of the majority of private installations in England but this information is not continually monitored.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his plans to provide additional MRI scanning capacity in Worcestershire. [126962]

Dr. Ladyman: The magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanner at Worcester Royal Infirmary was installed in March 2002 and has been working full-time since 1 July 2003.

Worcestershire Acute Hospitals National Health Service Trust is to install another MRI scanner at Kidderminster hospital as part of the diagnostic and treatment centre development which is due to be up and running before the end of this year. This will be funded as part of the NHS Cancer Plan commitment to provide 50 additional MRI scanners by 2004.

MRSA

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has commissioned into best practice in preventing MRSA, with particular reference to overseas examples. [116436]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No research has been specifically commissioned with a focus on identifying best practice in preventing methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA).

However, a broad strategic programme of research has recently been commissioned aimed at improving our scientific understanding of antimicrobial resistance. Over £2.5 million worth of research has been commissioned during the past six months, following an open competitive call for research proposals, and following rigorous peer review.

A number of these research projects will provide useful information relating to best practice in preventing MRSA. Those that relate most closely include the following:

A project at the University of Leeds and Leeds General Infirmary entitled, 'What is the size and nature of the current need for single room isolation in hospital, and how does success or failure to isolate patients affect the control of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*.'

A project at Thames Valley University, London entitled, 'Collaborative research to reduce the incidence of hospital ward-acquired methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) colonisation/infection, using Statistical Process Control (SPC) feedback and structured diagnosis of the underlying causes of MRSA acquisition.'

A project at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine entitled, 'Faster testing for MRSA—Models to estimate the cost-effectiveness of faster testing of cases admitted for hip and knee replacement.'

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions are taking place between his Department and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to create a new fast track process allowing interim guidance between class appraisals to be given for medical treatments that are licensed. [126372]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Officials have held preliminary discussions with the National Institute for Clinical Excellence about the possible development of interim guidance, but no decisions have yet been taken.

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to make more resources available for the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to conduct more appraisals each year. [126373]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Funding for the National Institute for Clinical Excellence has been set for the three financial years, 2003–04 to 2005–06. The funding includes provision for an additional appraisal committee to be established. This will enable more appraisals to be carried out.

Needle Stick Injuries

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hours were spent by NHS staff in 2002–03 *(a)* investigating accidents and *(b)* completing accident reports concerning needle stick injuries suffered by nurses and other health care staff. [127002]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health does not collect this data centrally but has advised all national health service trusts that all accidents including needle sticks should be reported and recorded.

Health and Safety legislation and good management practice requires the causes of accidents to be properly investigated to inform risk assessments and reduce the possibility of such accidents happening again.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost to the NHS was in 2002–03 of occupational sick pay, statutory sick pay and NHS injury benefits given to nurses and other health care staff who have suffered needle stick injury. [127003]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health does not collect information on sick pay or injury benefits centrally as these are matters for individual national health service employers. Information for individual NHS trusts should be available locally.

The NHS Pensions Agency does collect data on Temporary Injury Benefit payable to staff injured during employment in the NHS. For injuries sustained before 1997 the annual costs of Personal Injury Benefit (PIB), funded centrally, are currently £38.7 million. Since 1997, PIB costs are re-charged to the NHS employer and these figures are not held centrally.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost to the NHS was in 2002–03 of *(a)* counselling services and *(b)* loss of earnings litigation for nurses and other health care staff who suffered needle stick injury. [127004]

Mr. Hutton: All staff in the national health service have access to confidential counselling services and best practice is that staff are offered counselling after accidents and injuries. Referring employees to occupational health or infection control staff, who will carry out the necessary tests to ascertain whether there has been any transmission of a blood borne virus, is usually done during working hours, as is counselling. There is no centrally held data available on the exact cost of counselling services provided by NHS employing organisations.

The Department of Health does not collect data on individual litigation cases. "The National Audit Office Report A Safer Place to Work—Improving the Management of Health and Safety Risks to Staff in NHS Trusts", estimated that compensation payments cost the NHS £1.5 million in 2001–02. The average compensation payment negotiated by UNISON with NHS employers for needlesticks injuries that do not result in the transmission of blood borne viruses is currently £2,000.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost to the NHS was in 2002–03 of providing cover for nurses and other health care staff who have been forced to take time off for investigation, treatment and counselling as a result of blood-borne viruses contracted through needle stick injury. [127005]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the cost of providing staff to cover for health care workers absent due to injury is not collected centrally by the Department of Health.

In the majority of cases where there has been no transmission of a blood borne virus, the investigation, treatment and counselling associated with a needle stick injury will take place in working hours.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what emotional and psychological support is provided to nurses and other health care staff who are concerned about having been infected with a blood-borne virus contracted through needle stick injury. [127006]

Mr. Hutton: National health service staff who experience a needle stick injury which they believe may result in their being infected with a blood borne virus are referred to infection control staff who carry out the necessary tests and provide advice and counselling. If the health care worker concerned requests it, they will also be referred to a counselling service.

NHS unions also provide advice and support to their members to assist them in coping with workplace injuries.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses and other health care staff who have become infected with a blood-borne virus as a result of needle stick injury have been forced to leave their employment as a result of this infection in the last five years. [127007]

Mr. Hutton: Information on health care workers who have become infected with a blood borne virus is not collected centrally by the Department of Health, but should be available from individual national health service employers.

Many health care workers infected with hepatitis B and health care workers infected with hepatitis C or HIV should not perform exposure prone procedures, those procedures in which injury to the health care worker could result in the worker's blood contaminating a patient's open tissue. However, being HIV or hepatitis C positive or carrying hepatitis B is not a bar to working in the NHS. Where modification of working practice is necessary, suitable alternative work or retraining opportunities are made available, in accordance with good general principles of occupational health and general management practice.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses and other health care staff have contracted *(a)* hepatitis B, *(b)* hepatitis C and *(c)* HIV as a result of needle stick injuries in each of the last five years. [127008]

Mr. Hutton: No complete data are available centrally on the number of health care workers who have contracted blood borne viruses as a result of needle stick injuries. However, the Health Protection Agency, formerly the Public Health Laboratory Service, runs enhanced surveillance whereby occupational health departments can report such incidents on a voluntary basis. The results in the last five years are shown in the table.

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Hepatitis B	0	0	0	0	0
Hepatitis C	0	0	1	1	0
HIV	0	1	0	0	0

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses and other health care staff have sustained needle stick injuries in each of the last five years. [127009]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health does not collect this data centrally but has advised all national health service trusts that it should be collected locally to enable them to assess the risks to staff and patients. Figures for needle stick injuries should be available from NHS trusts locally.

The National Audit Office report 'A Safer Place to Work, improving the management of health and safety risks to staff in NHS Trusts' estimated that there were 23,000 needle stick injuries in England each year.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dental practices in each primary care trust are accepting new patients for treatment on the NHS who are *(a)* elderly, *(b)* children, *(c)* unemployed and *(d)* disabled. [126323]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The number of dental practices accepting new patients for National Health Service treatment who are elderly, unemployed and disabled is not held centrally.

Children are exempt from dental charges and many unemployed, elderly and disabled people are eligible for full or partial remission of charges.

Information on the number of general dental service (GDS) practices and personal dental service (PDS) pilots in each primary care trust (PCT) reported at 21 July 2003 on the www.nhs.uk website as accepting patients exempt from dental charges for registration and accepting children for registration has been placed in the Library.

In addition, other practices, including PDS pilots, among them, dental access centres, will be providing NHS dental care to patients without registration.

When a GDS or PDS dentist accepts a patient for registration they have an obligation to provide NHS dental treatment as required to secure and maintain the oral health of that patient.

NHS Senior Management

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures he has put in place in the last two years to track the career moves of *(a)* chairmen, *(b)* chief executives, *(c)* directors and *(d)* senior management positions within the national health service; [126699]

(2) what measures he has put in place in the last two years to gather data on *(a)* career progression and *(b)* wastage rates of (i) chairmen, (ii) chief executives, (iii) directors and (iv) senior management positions within the national health service. [126700]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since it was established in April 2001, the National Health Service Leadership Centre has drawn up development portfolios for chief executives, executive directors and clinical staff across the NHS. Most recently a development portfolio has been developed with the NHS Appointments Commission for chairs. These programmes are designed to provide focused development and have helped to track the careers of some senior staff in the NHS. More recently, the Leadership Centre has established a career development and succession planning scheme known as 'NHS Leaders'. This is intended to build and strengthen leadership across the NHS; to ensure that all senior leaders have personal development plans and are supported in their career development; to provide information to support appointments and succession planning; and to provide tailored development for newcomers to improve the performance of the NHS. A database of all senior leaders has also been compiled which will track the careers of these leaders.

The NHS Appointments Commission has established a record keeping system for all chairs and non-executives which records their service to the NHS. This is particularly useful when encouraging non-executives to apply for chair positions. The Commission also records those individuals who resign from their board.

NHS Staff

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent *(a)* occupational therapists, *(b)* ophthalmologists, *(c)* opticians, *(d)* physiotherapists, *(e)* chiropodists, *(f)* dieticians, *(g)* music therapists and *(h)* drama therapists worked in the NHS in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [127022]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Compared with 1998 there are now 20 per cent. more consultants in ophthalmology, 23 per cent. more occupational therapists, 17 per cent. more orthoptists and opticians, 16 per cent. more physiotherapists, 6 per cent. more chiropodists, 21 per cent. more dieticians and 15 per cent. more arts therapists.

England as at 30 September each year

Whole-time equivalents

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Consultants in Ophthalmology	556	582	606	613	661
Consultants in medical Ophthalmology	1	4	2	6	7
Occupational therapists	10,194	10,792	11,188	11,816	12,541
Orthoptists/opticians[1]	878	890	919	1,013	1,026
Physiotherapists	11,709	12,047	12,515	12,992	13,586
Chiropodists	2,750	2,771	2,847	2,894	2,916
Dieticians	1,961	2,058	2,129	2,255	2,377
Art/music/drama therapists	413	416	452	453	477

[1] This does not include private sector opticians who carry out NHS work for the General Ophthalmic Service

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Sources:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census

NHS Treatment Statistics

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people received treatment from the NHS in *(a)* England and *(b)* Essex in each year since 1980. [124873]

Mr. Hutton: Figures for general practitioner consultations, walk-in centre visits, accident and emergency attendances, hospital out-patient attendances, day case admissions and overnight hospital admissions have been placed in the Library. The national health service does not report to the Department of Health whether or not treatment was given, but only whether the consultation or admission took place, which is what is displayed in the figures.

NICE Research

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's research into the use of *(a)* clopidogrel and *(b)* dipyridamole for the prevention of (i) occlusive vascular and (ii) arterosclerotic events. [127032]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is appraising the clinical and cost effectiveness of clopidogrel and modified-release dipyridamole for the prevention of occlusive vascular events. NICE expects to publish guidance in June 2004. Further details are available on NICE'S website at www.nice.org.uk

North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust (Secondment)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the decision by North Cheshire Hospitals NHS trusts not to allow further secondments for support care workers to train as nurses. [125797]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* The secondment of staff onto nursing courses is a matter for individual national health service trusts. However, enabling healthcare assistants (HCAs) to train as nurses is an important part of our strategy to increase the NHS nursing workforce.

At present, the North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust has temporarily suspended the secondment of HCA's for nurse training. The trust is currently reviewing the selection processes so as to include more staff and to identify permanent methods of funding.

As soon as a solution is identified, the North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust will re-open the secondment provision.

Obesity

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many stomach stapling operations there were in each region in each of the last five years; and how many of these were carried out on children. [126346]

Mr. Hutton: The Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) database provides data on the number of surgical operations and procedures carried out in the national health service. Data on stomach stapling are collected under the code for partitioning of stomach. This code includes a number of procedures, and no further breakdown is available to identify stomach stapling procedures separately.

Operation Costs

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* hip replacement, *(b)* knee replacement, *(c)* cataract, *(d)* heart bypass and *(e)* varicose veins cost on average in 2002–03 (i) a private patient and (ii) the NHS; and what the difference was between the mid-private price and 60 per cent. of the NHS average cost. [125401]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect information on the average cost of treatments provided to private patients.

The national average costs for treatments within the national health service for 2002–03 are not currently available.

Overseas Patients

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are in place within NHS hospitals to monitor whether patients from overseas are eligible for free treatment on the NHS. [126013]

Mr. Hutton: Entitlement to national health service hospital treatment is based on residence in the United Kingdom. People who are not normally resident in the UK are subject to the provisions of the National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations, as amended, in 1991 (SI No. 438), 1994 (SI No. 1535), 2000 (SI No. 602), 2000 (SI No. 909).

The regulations place a responsibility on NHS trusts to establish a patient's residence. All patients should be asked, as a routine part of the admissions procedure, about their residence in the UK. A more detailed interview follows if it appears that they may be liable to charges. The Department of Health issued guidance to the NHS on this in 1988. Updated guidance was issued on 27 July 2003.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what entitlement overseas residents have to free NHS treatment, with particular reference to primary care. [125669]

Mr. Hutton: Overseas residents visiting the United Kingdom are eligible for free emergency or immediately necessary treatment from a primary care provider. For other primary medical care general practitioners or personal medical services, providers may accept such people as registered patients or as fee paying private patients. The Government expect general practice to exercise this discretion with sensitivity and due regard to the circumstances of each case. NHS walk-in centres routinely charge overseas visitors for use of the service.

Pain Relief

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* accident and emergency attendances and *(b)* GP attendances there were relating to pain in each region in each year since 1997; [126350]

(2) if he will estimate the cost to the NHS of treating pain in England in the last 12 months; [126351]

(3) if he will estimate the prevalence of chronic pain in England in each year since 1997; [126353]

(4) what proportion of the population under 18 suffered from *(a)* chronic pain, *(b)* recurrent pain and *(c)* pain which has lasted more than a month in each year since 1997; [126354]

(5) how many *(a)* finished consultant episodes and *(b)* hospital admissions there were relating to pain in each region in each year since 1997. [126438]

Mr. Hutton: Pain management is an important component of most patients' care, and is provided as part of overall treatment. The Department's Hospital Episode Statistics records information on diagnosis and procedures carried out in the national health service. It does not record information on the prevalence of pain in England, the cost to the NHS of treating pain, or the number of finished consultant episodes and hospital admissions relating to pain.

Patient Advocacy and Liaison Service

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 10 July 2003, *Official Report*, columns 1041–42W, on the Patient Advocacy and Liaison Service, if he will place in the Library the information collected by the recent mapping exercise. [126344]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A list of trusts reporting that they have an active patient advice and liaison service (PALS) is available in the Library. The list, together with contact details for the trusts, is also available on the PALS website at: www.doh.gov.uk/patientadviceandliaisonservice/

Patients Choice Initiative

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information will be available to patients to enable them to take part in the patients' choice initiative. [112157]

Mr. Hutton: Good quality information and effective support will be needed to enable patients to make informed choices. The Department of Health is examining the information patients and clinicians will need to inform patients' choice over the hospital or other healthcare provider where they are treated, and how to provide this information effectively. The Department is also considering the lessons from the London and coronary heart disease choice pilots which have employed patient care advisors to support patients in making their choice, including providing information about the choice on offer.

Information currently available to patients include the star ratings for all hospitals, waiting times for out-patient, day case and in-patient treatment and the information available on individual provider websites.

Information for patients will improve in the future as choice is extended to include convenience with regard to location and transport access and relevant clinical performance measures. Information that is currently available from a variety of sources will be gathered together, made available through the single entry point of nhs.uk, and will be easily accessible during the patient booking process.

Pay Costs

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 28 April 2003, *Official Report*, columns 279–80W, on NHS inspection staff, what the total pay costs incurred by the *(a)* Commission for Health Improvement, *(b)* National Institute for Clinical Excellence, *(c)* National Care Standards Commission and *(d)* Social Services Inspectorate were in each year since 1997. [113388]

Mr. Hutton: The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) came into being on 1 November 1999 and began to conduct a rolling programme of clinical governance reviews in 2001. An important aspect of this work is to complete a Clinical Governance Review of 500 national health service organisations by 2004. The total cost incurred in inspection work in each year since 1999 is shown in the table.

	Annual staffing costs (£)	*Staff employed*	*Full-time managers involved in inspection*	*Overall full-time staff involved in inspection*	*Total number of staff involved in inspections*	*Total pay costs of inspections (£)*
1999–00	592,000	111	14	13	27	230,756
2000–01	4,791,000	248	44	42	86	1,482,077
2001–02	11,492,000	330	59	62	121	5,897,395
2002–03	[1]16,359,000	334	59	69	128	7,444,475

[1] Pre audited figure

The rising costs are due to a large staff increase to undertake clinical governance reviews. CHI has completed 297 clinical governance reviews across a range of NHS bodies.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) was established in April 1999. It is a special health authority set up to give advice on best clinical practice to NHS clinicians, to those commissioning NHS services and to patients and carers. None of NICE'S work are involved in inspection work. The total staffing cost since 1999 is shown in the table.

	Annual staffing costs (£)	*Staff employed*	*Staff engaged in inspection work*	*Total pay costs of inspections*
1999–00	673,000	17	n/a	n/a
2000–01	1,320,000	32	n/a	n/a
2001–02	1,944,000	40	n/a	n/a
2002–03	2,706,000	59	n/a	n/a

The increase in the staffing costs for NICE is due to an increase in the number of staff employed at NICE.

The National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) became fully operational on 1 April 2002. The NCSC is responsible for registration and inspection of health and social care services in England. The total cost incurred in inspection work in the year 2002 is shown in the table.

	2002–03
Annual staffing cost (£)	69,118,000
Staff employed (number)	2,285
Staff engaged in inspection work (number)	1,350
Total pay costs of inspections (£ million)	49

The annual staffing cost is due to the number of staff employed.

The Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) is a division of the Department of Health. The structure and functions of both the Department and the SSI have changed over the period 1998–99 and 2002–03. The SSI inspects councils with social services responsibilities in England, and from this and other evidence, it assesses and reports on councils' performance, and where necessary makes recommendations for improvement.

The total cost incurred in inspection work in each year since 1998 is shown in the table.

	Annual staffing costs (£)	*Staff employed*	*Staff engaged in inspection work*	*Total pay costs of inspections (£)*
1997–98	5,000,000	156	92	2,981,551
1998–99	5,000,000	156	91	2,975,727
1999–2000	6,400,000	156	91	3,588,457
2000–01	7,800,000	198	108	4,443,699
2001–02	8,800,000	229	127	4,621,494
2002–03	9,200,000	236	120	n/a

There are four reasons why costs have increased in this period:

The increase in numbers of social services authorities took time to work its way through to additional inspection work

Modernising Social Services led to an annual review of council performance

There has been a move towards working alongside councils to improve their performance

Joint Reviews with the Audit Commission have expanded, and these figures include the SSI costs of Joint Reviews

There was an increase in the number of SSI regions from four to eight (coterminous with NHS regions) to nine (coterminous with Government Regional Offices).

Learning Disabilities

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning rent convergence when applied to specialist housing for those with learning disabilities. [126062]

Keith Hill: I have been asked to reply.

None.

Private Office Costs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what have been the running costs of Ministers' private offices in his Department in each year since 1997. [123112]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Parliamentary demands on private offices have risen since 1997. The information requested is shown in the table.

	Private office expenditure (£)
1997–98	1,848,676
1998–99	2,143,894
1999–2000	2,652,686
2000–01	2,871,965
2001–02	2,876,430
2002–03	3,161,046

Prostate Cancer

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made in implementing the NHS Prostate Cancer Programme of 2000. [126991]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Good progress has been made since the national health service prostate cancer programme was launched on 6 September 2000, setting out the Government's approach to improving prostate cancer services in England and Wales.

As part of the prostate cancer risk management programme (PCRMP), evidence-based primary care resource packs were sent to all general practitioners in England from 23 September 2002 to aid them in counselling men who are worried about prostate cancer, ensuring the men make an informed choice about whether or not to have a prostate specific antigen (PSA) test.

Other elements of the PCRMP include ensuring that a systematic and standardised follow-up pathway is available for individuals whose test result is above the PSA threshold and action to improve the quality of laboratory testing of PSA samples. Primary care and laboratories were informed of the related recommendations from the scientific reference group, which supports the PCRMP in September 2002.

By 2003–04 the Department of Health will be directly funding £4.2 million of research a year on prostate cancer. This is a twenty-fold increase compared with 1999–2000. Two National Cancer Research Institute prostate cancer research collaboratives have been established in Newcastle and London. Funded research includes studies on various treatments for prostate cancer, improving the PSA test and ethnic differences in prostate cancer incidence. The National Cancer Research Institute considered prostate cancer as part of its Strategic Analysis in 2002, but made no specific recommendations.

The Department is funding a Section 64 grant to the Prostate Cancer Charity to increase availability of further information about prostate cancer. This is supporting the creation, review, provision and dissemination of a range of awareness material, supported by £135,000 over three years. 96.6 per cent. of patients with suspected urological cancers (including prostate) were seen for their first out-patient appointment within two weeks of their general practitioner deciding they should be urgently referred, and the hospital receiving the referral within 24 hours, in January to March 2003.

The cancer services collaborative is modernising cancer care, including prostate cancer, by reducing unnecessary delays in the system for patients throughout the cancer journey.

The number of consultant urologists grew from 382 in 2000 to 427 in 2001, and is set to grow to 504 in 2005.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government has to introduce a public awareness campaign for prostate cancer. [126992]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Under the National Health Service Prostate Cancer Programme we have launched a number of initiatives to increase the public awareness of prostate cancer.

The Prostate Cancer Risk Management Programme was launched in July 2001 to educate the public, patients and professionals on the risks associated with individual testing for prostate cancer. To aid this evidence based primary care packs have been produced and have been distributed to all general practitioners in England.

We are also providing funding to the Prostate Cancer Charity to increase the available amount of information about prostate cancer. This funding supports the creation, review, provision and dissemination of a range of awareness material on prostate cancer.

We have also set up the Prostate Cancer Advisory Group to facilitate collaboration between the Department of Health, voluntary groups and patient and professional groups in all areas of prostate cancer, including awareness. The group met for the first time recently and decided that a sub-group would be formed to take forward the issue of public awareness.

Queen Alexandra Hospital (Cosham)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Syd Rapson) relating to the funding of Queen Alexandra Hospital at Cosham. [126959]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health met my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Syd Rapson) on 7 July 2003 to discuss issues relating to the Queen Alexandra Hospital.

Radiologists

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent radiologists were working in the NHS in each of the last five years. [127000]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the number of whole-time equivalent medical staff specialising in clinical radiology in the last five years.

Hospital Public Health Medicine and Community Health Services (HCHS) Medical staff with a specialty in clinical radiology

Whole-time equivalents

England as at 30 September	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
All clinical radiology staff	1,895	1,935	2,028	2,134	2,256	2,371
Of which						
Consultants	1,364	1,387	1,414	1,460	1,492	1,582

Note:
Figures rounded to the nearest whole number.
Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

The number of whole-time equivalent consultant radiologists increased by 16 per cent. between September 1997 and September 2002.

Research Investment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much and what proportion of public scientific research investment in the last five years went on research into *(a)* heart disease, *(b)* cancer and *(c)* stroke and stroke-related problems. [126530]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Funding for research in cancer, heart disease and stroke is provided from a number of different sources, including the Government, charities and industry. The Department of Health does not routinely collect information on all research expenditure.

The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The Department of Health funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the national health service. The Department also provides NHS support funding for research commissioned by the research councils and charities that takes place in the NHS.

Management of much of the research supported by NHS research and development funding is devolved and expenditure at project level is not held centrally by the Department. The information is therefore not available in the format requested for all years.

Available figures for Departmental and MRC estimated expenditure on cancer research are shown in the table:

£ million

	Department of Health	*Medical Research Council*
2001–02	not available	75.0
2000–01	83.8	70.0
1999–2000	77.4	52.0
1998–99	75.4	28.5
1997–98	53.0	27.0

It is important to note that scientific definitions have evolved over time and that the MRC has improved methods of capturing data and identifying spend. For these reasons, spend figures from one year to the next are not comparable.

The MRC's estimated expenditure on stroke research for the last five years is shown in the table.

£ million

2001–02	3.9
2000–01	3.4
1999–2000	4.0
1998–99	4.0
1997–98	3.3

The MRC spent £12.3 million on heart disease research in 1998–99 and £10.5 million in 1999–2000. Figures for subsequent years are for circulatory disease research: £24.7 million in 2000–01 and £26.3 million in 2001–02.

Estimated figures for departmental spend on cardiovascular disease and stroke research are £48.9 million in 1998–99, £49.1 million in 1999–2000 and £50.9 million in 2000–01.

Annual figures for net Government spend on research and development are published in *The Forward Look 2003*, which is available on the Office of Science and Technology website (www.ost.gov.uk/research/forwardlook03/).

Residential Care Homes

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of residential care homes *(a)* in East Sussex and *(b)* in England have been inspected by the National Care Standards Commission since 1 April 2002. [126689]

Dr. Ladyman: All care homes in East Sussex and in England have been inspected by the National Care Standards Commission since 1 April 2002.

Smoking

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies he has received of the consequences for health of banning smoking in public places. [126090]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 16 July 2003]:* The Department of Health is aware of a range of studies set out in the 1998 Report of the independent Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health (ISBN 0-11-322124-X) and more recently in the key chapter entitled "Second Hand Smoke—Getting Serious About It" in the Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer, published in June 2003 (32189). Copies of the publications are available in the Library.

Stroke Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards the target of 100 per cent. of general hospitals to have a specialist stroke unit by April 2004. [126525]

Dr. Ladyman: A monitoring exercise conducted at the end of 2002 suggested that 83 per cent. of hospitals had plans in place to have a specialist stroke service by April 2004.

The Department of Health will be monitoring formally the overall stroke milestone in April 2004, as this is included as one of the key targets in "Improvement, Expansion and Reform", the priorities and planning framework for 2003–06. Progress on this key target will be monitored through the 2003–04 local delivery plan reporting mechanism and information will be available later in the year.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated for strokes *(a)* in each NHS trust and *(b)* in each strategic health authority in each year since 1997. [126526]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards the Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation, target for reducing strokes in those under 75 years. [126531]

Dr. Ladyman: There is no target in Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation specifically for reducing strokes.

There is a target in Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation for reducing the rate of mortality from 'All Circulatory Diseases'. This includes stroke, also coronary heart disease and related diseases. The Our Healthier Nation target is "to reduce the death rate from all circulatory diseases in people under age 75 years by at least 40 per cent. by 2010".

Progress in respect of the Our Healthier Nation mortality target for all circulatory diseases is monitored using a three year moving average of the age standardised mortality rate for people aged under 75 years.

The most recent data show a fall of almost 19 per cent. in the rate since the baseline period of 1995 to 1997.

All Circulatory Diseases (ICD-10 100–199) Persons Aged Under 75 years
Death rate per 100,000 population in England
(European age standardised, and adjusted for ICD-10)

Years	*Three-year average mortality rate*
1995/6/7[1] (Baseline)	141.5
1996/7/8[1]	135.7
1 997/8/9[1]	128.7
1 998/9/2000[1]	122.0
1999/2000/01[1]	114.8
Milestone (2004/5/6)	106. 1
Target (2009/10/11	84.9
Percentage change in rate since baseline	– 18.9

Source:
Office for National Statistics.
[1] Rates for years other than 1999 and 2001 calculated using numbers of deaths coded under ICD9. Adjusted to be on the same basis as ICD10. See note B below.

Single year rates and numbers of deaths from stroke among people in England aged under 75 over the same time period are shown in the following table:

Cerebrovascular Disease (Stroke) (ICD-10 160–169) persons aged under 75
Death rate per 100,000 population in England
(European age standardised, and adjusted for ICD 10)

Year	*Single year Mortality rate*[1]	*Number of deaths*
1995[1]	26.5	13,465
1996[1]	26.3	13,190
1997[1]	25.0	12,498
1998[1]	24.4	12,140
1999	23.2	12M293
2000[1]	21.2	10,561
2001	20.6	10,947

Note:
Change: 1995 to 2001 – 17.9 per cent.
Source:
Office for National Statistics.
[1] Rates calculated using numbers of deaths coded under ICD9 adjusted to be on the same basis as ICD10 – see Note B below.

Note B: Causes of death in England and Wales were coded to the Ninth Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-9) from 1979 to 2000. Cerebrovascular diseases which includes stroke and related conditions, were coded to 430–438. In the Tenth Revision (ICD-10), introduced in 2001, the same conditions are coded to 160–169. However, the way in which the underlying cause of death is selected from the conditions written on the certificate changed in ICD-10. This led to an increase of about 13 per cent. in the number of deaths attributed to cerebrovascular diseases in men and 9 per cent. in women. Time trends should therefore be interpreted with caution. The effects of the change in classification has been described in detail in ONS publications.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure that *(a)* primary care trusts and *(b)* NHS trusts have reviewed arrangements to identify those at greatest risk of stroke; [126536]

(2) what monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure that *(a)* primary care trusts and *(b)* NHS trusts have agreed local priorities to improve the rates of identification and effective intervention in stroke. [126537]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department of Health will be monitoring formally the overall stroke milestone in April 2004 as this is included as one of the key targets in Improvement, Expansion and Reform, the priorities and planning framework for the National Health Service for 2003–06. It is now for strategic health authorities to plan, deliver and monitor progress locally on the other stroke milestones in the national service framework for older people.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what progress has been made to ensure that by April 2004 every general practice, using protocols agreed with local specialist services, can identify and treat patients identified as being at risk of a stroke because of high blood pressure, atrial fibrillation or other risk factors. [126541]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department of Health will be monitoring formally the overall stroke milestone in April 2004, as this is included as one of the key targets in Improvement, Expansion and Reform, the priorities and planning framework for the National Health Service for 2003–2006. It is now for strategic health authorities to plan, deliver and monitor progress locally on the other stroke milestones in the national service framework for older people. Therefore progress on this key target will be monitored through the 2003–04 local delivery plan reporting mechanism and information will be available later in the year.

Waiting Times

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of patients waited up to *(a)* four weeks, *(b)* 13 weeks and *(c)* 26 weeks for their first outpatient appointment for cardiology following GP referral; and how many patients were waiting for over 13 weeks at quarter end in (i) England and (ii) each NHS region in each quarter since Q1 1997. [121747]

Mr. Hutton: Information on waiting times for first consultant outpatient appointment for cardiology following a general practitioner written referral for each quarter since Q1, 1997 has been placed in the Library. Over this period the number of people waiting over 26 weeks for their first outpatient appointment in cardiology fell from 571 at end June 1997 to none at end March 2003.

Walking

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the studies conducted by him into the health benefits of walking in the last six years. [126547]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Regular walking can help in the maintenance of a healthy weight as well as helping to prevent and manage heart disease.

Many studies have been carried out on the health benefits of walking. The Department is presently undertaking a review of the evidence for the relationship between physical activity and health, which will be concerned with the full range of human activity from competitive sport and exercise to walking, cycling, dancing or activity as part of work. We hope to publish the results of the review at the end of the year to support enhanced public health efforts to promote regular physical activity.

Further evidence of the benefits of regular physical activity, including walking, will emerge from the forthcoming local exercise action pilots (LEAP) that are being developed with Sport England and the Countryside Agency. The LEAP programme will test different evidence based community approaches to increasing access to, and the levels of physical activity, with a particular focus on hard to reach and at risk groups. Walking will be a feature of several of the LEAP pilots and will be included in the evaluation of the whole programme.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospital trusts whose *(a)* maternity units and *(b)* accident and emergency departments are expected to be (i) merged and (ii) unable to provide continuous 24 hour cover following the implementation of the European Working Time Directive in August 2004. [126694]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not accept that achieving Working Time Directive compliance by itself will lead to the closure of services. On 17 July strategic health authorities were asked to ensure that every hospital prepares a local action plan by the end of this year to achieve compliance and maintain local services. Those trusts facing the greatest challenges will have priority when postgraduate deans allocate 1,500 additional specialist registrar training places available this year. Maternity and accident and emergency services will be included in this process.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Criminal Records Bureau

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of the increase in cost of Criminal Record Bureau checks on small and medium-sized care homes. [124842]

Paul Goggins: Responsibility for paying the fee for a criminal record Disclosure rests with the individual applicant, although it is open to the employer to reimburse the cost. I have placed in the Library a Regulatory Impact Assessment which assesses the impact of the fee increase across all sectors.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what consultation took place with the Criminal Records Bureau's customers about the increase in fees for obtaining disclosure certificates; [122482]

(2) what assessment he has made of whether sufficient notice was given to registered bodies to assess the budgetary impact of the increase in fees for obtaining disclosure certificates from the Criminal Records Bureau; [122483]

(3) whether an impact assessment for registered bodies was carried out prior to the announcement of increased fee levels for obtaining disclosure certificates from the Criminal Records Bureau; and whether such an assessment will be carried out in future. [122484]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 30 June 2003]:* The Government made it clear when the original £12 fee was announced that it was our intention that the Criminal Records Bureau would be self-financing in the medium term. That remains our objective. However, in the short term, the costs of the CRB will continue to be met by a combination of fee receipts and contributions from the Home Office, the Department of Health and Department for Education and Skills. The CRB is expected to achieve full cost recovery from 2005–06.

In view of the need to maintain as even as possible demand for the Disclosure service it was not possible to consult on the fee increase in advance of the announcement on 5 June.

Responsibility for paying the fee rests primarily with the individual applicant, although it is open to the employer to reimburse the cost. Disclosures will continue to be issued to volunteers free of charge.

A Regulatory Impact Assessment which assesses the impact of the fee increase for the voluntary and business sectors has been placed in the Library. In line with normal practice, a further assessment would be undertaken to accompany any future increase in fees that was above inflation.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* paper based, *(b)* phone based and *(c)* e-based applications for (i) standard and (ii) enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks were received in each month up until 1 July 2003. [123763]

Paul Goggins: The figures requested are summarised in the following table.

The gross applications refer to the number received by the CRB and the net receipts refer to the number that are being processed on the system. The difference between these figures is the number of applications returned to customers for amendment.

Month	*Phone based applications (Gross)*	*Paper based applications (Gross)*	*Total applications received (Gross)*	*Total net receipts*
March 2002	1,384	1,381	2,765	2,306
April 2002	10,337	29,376	39,713	34,301
May 2002	17,505	70,360	87,865	82,821
June 2002	17,312	72,892	90,204	88,442
July 2002	39,600	119,793	159,393	134,206
August 2002	31,220	112,810	144,030	129,049
September 2002	37,729	167,139	204,868	185,153
October 2002	40,345	186,995	227,340	208,784
November 2002	36,795	150,668	187,463	171,893
December 2002	31,778	120,006	151,784	138,454
January 2003	32,372	128,496	160,868	144,538
February 2003	35,509	142,715	178,224	161,286
March 2003	39,064	156,435	195,499	174,832
April 2003	32,616	137,662	170,278	151,676
May 2003	34,353	146,565	180,918	162,208
June 2003	41,532	211,127	252,659	227,092
Total	479,451	1,954,420	2,433,871	2,197,041

At present the CRB has no e-based route for applications. Also, the CRB are unable to give a breakdown of Standard and Enhanced Disclosures for Telephone Disclosure Application Forms and Blank Disclosure Application Forms (paper based).

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultation was held with the voluntary sector in relation to the increase in fees for Criminal Records Bureau checks; what factors underlay the decision to make the increases; and if he will make a statement. [124790]

Paul Goggins: With regard to consultation with the voluntary sector I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 8 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 721W. In respect of the factors underlying the fee increase, I refer the hon. Member to the written statement made by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 5 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 27–29WS.

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many disclosure applications were dealt with by the Criminal Records Bureau in the last 12 months; and what the average time taken was to process an application. [126723]

Paul Goggins: During the last 12 months the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) has issued a total of 1,946,465 Disclosures broken down as follows:

Standard Disclosures: 243,382

Enhanced Disclosures: 1,703,083

The average time taken to process a Disclosure during this period was between five and six weeks.

The CRB current targets, published in our Corporate and Business Plan 2003 are to process 90 per cent. of Standard Disclosures within two weeks and 90 per cent. Enhanced Disclosures within four weeks. The CRB has been consistently achieving these service standards in recent weeks.

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received from individuals and organisations about fees charged by the Criminal Records Bureau. [126920]

Paul Goggins: Since announcing the increase in Disclosure application fees charged by the Criminal Records Bureau on 5 June, we have received approximately 350 written representations primarily concerning the scale of the increase and the lack of consultation prior to the introduction of the new fees. The majority of these representations have been from organisations.

Extradition Agreement

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the extradition agreement between the USA and UK. [126867]

Caroline Flint: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) on 16 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 28W.

Absconding Prisoners

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 24 June 2003, *Official Report*, columns 736–38 on prisons, how many absconding prisoners committed a further offence, for which they were charged, during their absence from prison, in each year; what assessment he has made of the basis for selecting prisoners for transfer to Kirkham open prison; and how many prison officers were in post at each open prison in each year. [125794]

Paul Goggins: Offences committed by prisoners who are unlawfully at large, following their abscond from an open prison, and for which they were subsequently charged, is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The categorisation procedures use an algorithm to indicate a provisional security category for each individual prisoner. This is then accepted or rejected following a consideration of the medical and mental health of the prisoner, and previous custodial experiences. This is a national system and is applied to all prisoners who are transferred to Kirkham. Additional local criteria means that prisoners with any history of sexual offences are excluded from Kirkham. A fundamental review of the categorisation of all prisoners is currently under way. This does include the procedures by which prisoners are considered as suitable for open conditions.

The following table shows the number of uniformed prison discipline staff at each of the prisons referred to in the answer of 24 June 2003.

	January to December					*January to June*
Establishment	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Askham Grange	29	29	29	28	29	29
Blantyre House	34	34	34	34	36	35
Drake Hall	63	64	64	67	81	89
East Sutton Park	23	23	25	25	22	24
Ford	62	63	64	61	61	62
Hatfield Moorland	320	317	311	316	322	338
Hewell Grange	27	27	28	29	29	29
Hollesley Bay	147	137	153	155	171	167
Kirkham	85	82	86	85	86	86
Kirklevington	42	41	37	37	38	44
Latchmere House	38	39	40	38	40	38
Leyhill	71	70	69	66	63	68
Morton Hall	31	30	37	68	81	109
North Sea Camp	32	32	32	34	36	40
Usk Prescoed	84	83	88	88	85	89
Grendon	159	164	175	172	154	153
Standford Hill	80	84	81	81	78	91
Sudbury	68	67	68	63	63	65
Thorn Cross	106	106	113	115	111	106
Wealstun	147	147	148	146	147	154

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the results of the pilot schemes for antisocial behaviour orders. [126503]

Caroline Flint: There were no pilot schemes for antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs). They were introduced across the whole of England and Wales under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 on 1 April 1999. In the period to 31 March 2003, the courts reported 1,112 ASBO's had been made.

The West Midlands has seen the second highest number of ASBOs in the country with 120 between 1 April 999 and 31 March 2003.

The Police Reform Act 2002 introduced interim orders, orders on conviction in criminal courts and orders in county court proceedings, enabled the British Transport Police and registered social landlords to apply for ASBOs and extended the area an ASBO can cover to any defined part or the whole of England and Wales.

Communities are already experiencing the benefits as agencies on the ground use their new powers. Interim orders in particular are already widely in use across the country and orders have also been made to stop individuals from antisocial acts across the whole of England and Wales. Over a quarter of the 200 orders granted since the introduction of the Police Reform Act 2002 changes have been orders on conviction. Orders were introduced into the county court in April this year and we are aware that some have already been granted.

The Anti-Social Behaviour Bill has been published and is going through the House. It refines ASBOs by:

Allowing persons other than the defendant in proceedings in the county court whose anti-social behaviour is relevant to be joined to those proceedings for the purpose of seeking an order against them;

Giving relevant authorities access to youth court hearings of ASBO breaches;

Attaching parenting orders to parents of any child receiving an ASBO;

Allowing local authorities to prosecute ASBO breaches;

Ensuring the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) asks for orders on conviction; and

Allowing Housing Action Trusts (HATs) to apply for ASBOs.

Appointments

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the people appointed to ad hoc posts within his Department bearing the titles of advocate, tsar, adviser, champion and comparable titles since May 1997; what their job title is or was; what their role is or was; whether they were or are being paid; what the total cost of each such person was in each financial

year, including expenses and benefits; what the expected cost of each such person is in 2003–04; to whom they are accountable; and if he will make a statement. [112466]

Mr. Blunkett: Details of numbers of Special Advisers and their salaries are published annually for the Government as a whole. This includes Special Advisers in the Home Office. I would refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 328W. All Home Office Special Advisers are accountable to me.

Arson

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the detection rate for arson in England and Wales was in each year since 1997; and what the detection rate for all crime was in each year. [125743]

Ms Blears: The available information from police recorded crime data on detection rates for arson and all recorded crime in England and Wales for the years since 1997 are as follows:

Percentage detection rates—England and Wales

	Arson	*All recorded crime*
1997[1]	16	28
1998–99[2]	10	29
1999–2000[3]	9	25
2000–01	8	24
2001–02[4]	8	23

[1] Calendar year, and years ending March thereafter.

[2] There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which may have affected detection rates.

[3] There was a change in the counting rules for detections on 1 April 1999, which will have had an effect on detection rates.

[4] Detection rates may have been affected by some police forces adopting the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard in advance of its national implementation on 1 April 2002.

Asylum Centres

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was to his Department of monitoring the contracts for each asylum centre in each of the last five years. [118611]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 11 June 2003]:* I refer the hon. Member to the letter I wrote on 3 July 2003.

Asylum Seekers

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his officials at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate will issue status papers granting indefinite leave to remain to a constituent of the hon. Member for Vauxhall (number: M616441) as indicated in a letter from his Minister of State, dated 17 March. [125678]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 18 July 2003.

CCTV Cameras (Daedalus Site)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the purpose was of the recent installation of CCTV cameras near to the Daedalus site at Lee-on-the-Solent. [126958]

Beverley Hughes: A traffic survey was commissioned as part of our on-going assessment of the suitability of a site at Her Majesty's Service Daedalus as an accommodation centre for asylum seekers. This survey involved the temporary deployment of mobile cameras during the week beginning 7 July 2003.

Chief Constables

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Chief Constables he has met since 2001. [125524]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I meet police officers of all ranks, including chief officers, as often as possible. These meetings are at a variety of formal and informal events, including visits to police forces, police association conferences and working groups.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has issued to chief constables *concerning (a)* contact between hon. Members and their local chief constable and *(b)* answering correspondence from hon. Members. [125525]

Ms Blears: I have issued no guidance to chief officers on contact with hon. Members or on answering correspondence from them. These are matters for the chief officers themselves.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on 9 April 2003, *Official Report*, column 281W.

I would expect a chief officer to offer every courtesy to hon. Members on matters affecting his or her constituency.

Cleveland Police

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional funding tied to which specific programmes has been allocated *(a)* to Cleveland constabulary and *(b)* in total to all UK forces in each year since 1997. [114306]

Caroline Flint: The table lists grants that have been allocated or awarded to Cleveland and to other police authorities in England and Wales, for which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has responsibility.

In addition to the grants listed, Cleveland receive support towards the costs of the PFI firearms training facility operated jointly with Durham constabulary.

Specific programme allocations for England and Wales police authorities

£ million

Year/Specific Programmes	*Cleveland*	*Total forces*
1997–98		
Crime Fighting Fund	—	—
Basic Command Unit	—	—
Airwave digital radio service	—	—
DNA Expansion	—	—
Capital grant	0.60	104.17
CSOs	—	—
1998–99		
Crime Fighting Fund	—	—
Basic Command Unit	—	—
Airwave digital radio service	—	—
DNA Expansion	—	—
Capital grant	0.60	91.11
CSOs	—	—
1999–2000		
Crime Fighting Fund	—	—
Basic Command Unit	—	—
Airwave digital radio service	—	—
DNA Expansion	—	—
Capital grant	0.59	91.11
CSOs	—	—
2000–01		
Crime Fighting Fund	0.28	40.61
Basic Command Unit	—	—
Airwave digital radio service	—	—
DNA Expansion	0.35	16.22
Capital grant	0.65	91.11
CSOs	—	—
2001–02		
Crime Fighting Fund	0.96	138.90
Basic Command Unit	—	—
Airwave digital radio service	0	93.30
DNA Expansion	0.70	45.66
Capital grant	0.85	91.11
CSOs	—	—
2002–03		
Crime Fighting Fund	1.82	229.79
Basic Command Unit	—	—
Airwave digital radio service	3.17	104.47
DNA Expansion	0.64	54.96
Capital grant	0.93	107.11
CSOs	0.30	19.00
2003–04		
Crime Fighting Fund	2.04	263.52
Basic Command Unit	0.64	49.98
Airwave digital radio service	0.56	9618
DNA Expansion	0.70	54.42
Capital grant	1.04	117.11
CSOs	0.12	41.00

Notes:

1. In addition, special grant of £1.9 million was paid to Cleveland Police Authority in 2001 to assist with the costs of the Operational Lancet inquiry.

2. Police authorities also receive grant to support costs of borrowing against Supplementary Credit Approvals.

3. Figures for 2003–04 are estimates of currently expected payments.

Commissioner for Correctional Services

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the responsibilities are of the new Commissioner for Correctional Services. [125663]

Paul Goggins: Martin Narey became Commissioner for the Correctional Services on 10 March 2003. His role is to set the strategic direction for and manage the Directors General of the Prison and Probation Services and to ensure the effective, joint working of the Prison and Probation Services and the Youth Justice Board.

Contingency Planning

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the ability of the emergency services to treat casualties exposed to radioisotope contamination from the explosion of a radiological bomb within a medically appropriate time. [125158]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 592W.

Correspondence

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter of 13 January 2003 from the hon. Member for Leicester, East to the Minister for State, Citizenship and Immigration, P1048812, concerning his constituent, Mrs. Patel. [122999]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 17 July 2003.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak, dated 23 January 2003, PO ref 2895/3 regarding Phillipa Eblele Nyakutsilwa. [125283]

Beverley Hughes: Due to an administrative error, my hon. Friend's letter was forwarded to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, when it was a matter for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to deal with. It has now been sent to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for reply. I am sorry for the delay.

Crime (Fraudulent Reports)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the extent of fraudulent reporting of crimes to the police. [124992]

Ms Blears: Details of the extent of fraudulent reporting of crimes to the police are not collected centrally.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve the *(a)* accuracy and *(b)* presentation of crime statistics. [124791]

Ms Blears: The Home Office has always acknowledged the need to improve the accuracy and presentation of the recorded crime statistics. Two important reviews were published in July 2000 which dealt with both these points, and a range of other matters.

The first was the "Review of Crime Statistics" (the 'Simmons Review'), which made a total of 66 recommendations. The report set out clearly some of the problems with the arrangements in place at that time and provided a blueprint for a system of crime statistics in England and Wales designed to overcome those problems and to provide a clearer and more reliable set of crime data. A group was established to oversee this review and to ensure that the recommendations were

sound, and that group received cross-party support. The full review and the conclusions of this expert group, which asked only that the recommendation relating to establishing an index of crime not be implemented, are available on the Home Office website.

The second report was a thematic inspection report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), entitled "On the Record". One of the conclusions of that report was that interpretation of the Home Office Counting Rules for recording crime by police forces was inconsistent and made it hard to establish the degree to which differences in crime rates were simply due to recording factors, or represented a real change in crime.

As a result of both of these reports, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) developed the new National Crime Recording Standard. The Standard aims to promote a greater consistency between police forces in the recording of crime and to take a more victim oriented approach to crime recording.

The National Crime Recording Standard was adopted nationally with effect from 1 April 2002. However, the work to establish standards for recording and greater consistency is on-going. In addition, a new audit regime has been introduced, overseen by the Police Standards Unit in the Home Office and carried out on their behalf by the Audit Commission. The audits are designed to ensure that forces are implementing the Standard and applying the Counting Rules correctly. In addition, Force Crime Registrars are encouraged to undertake their own internal audits, and guidance has been provided to ensure that any such auditing is robust.

A further data source is the British Crime Survey (BCS). The BCS is considered to be the most reliable measure of personal and household crime in England and Wales and significant improvements have been made to the Survey recently. The Survey has increased its sample size from 20,000 interviews to 40,000 and it is now conducted on a rolling year basis. The BCS also includes those crimes that are not reported to or recorded by the police. While the BCS does not claim to count all crimes in England and Wales, it does provide a consistent measure of trends from one year to the next in those crimes of greatest concern to members of the public.

With regard to the presentation of crime statistics, the Review of Crime Statistics recommended that the recorded crime statistics and the British Crime Survey should be considered together. They are complementary series that, taken together, provide a better picture of crime than can be obtained from either series alone. The publication of the data in this way ensures that the public has available the most comprehensive picture of crime in a single volume and at the same time.

Figures from both sources were published together for the first time in July last year in "Crime and England and Wales 2001–02" (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 07/02). The second combined volume covering the period 2002–03 has been published and copies are available in the Library. We believe that this publication provides the best and most comprehensive presentation of the latest position on crime in England and Wales.

Due to the introduction of the new National Crime Recording Standard, this publication makes necessary adjustments to the recorded crime figures in order to present a more accurate picture of the real trends in crime underlying the recording changes. The Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate has published a further report, entitled "National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS): An Analysis of the Impact on Recorded Crime" to explain how these adjustments have been derived, and the impact both nationally and in individual police forces.

As police forces have now had a full year in which to implement the new standard, and as the research report shows that the impact of the new standard appears to be complete for our main target crimes, I am announcing that this is the last occasion on which we will make these adjustments to the recorded crime figures.

The Home Office is committed to continually improving both the accuracy and presentation of the statistics on crime, and will continue to make necessary changes to those statistics in order to do so in future.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases are awaiting review by the Criminal Cases Review Commission. [124986]

Paul Goggins: At 31 March 2003, 282 cases were awaiting the commencement of a review by the Criminal Cases Review Commission. Further details are available from the Commission's 2002–03 Annual Report available from the Library.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the cases awaiting review by the Criminal Cases Review Commission were referred in each month during the period that the longest has been awaiting review. [125419]

Paul Goggins: A copy of the Criminal Cases Review Commission's 2002–03 Annual Report is available from the Library (and also at: www.ccrc.gov.uk). This sets out that the Commission's case review process is divided into several discrete Stages. Stage 0 is for initial inquiries, Stage 1 to assess eligibility for a review, Stage 2 screen to expedite those cases that can be reviewed with only modest caseworker effort. Stage 2 involves those cases requiring resource intensive reviews. A few of these will proceed to Stage 3, which requires the formal appointment of an Investigating Officer. The main build up of cases awaiting review therefore occurs at Stage 2 and the Commission has provided an analysis of this. The table and graph indicates the length of time as at 30 June 2003 that in custody cases (to which the Commission gives priority) and at liberty cases have been awaiting the allocation of a caseworker prior to the start of a Stage 2 review. table and graph indicates the length of time as at 30 June 2003 that in custody cases (to which the Commission gives priority) and at liberty cases have been awaiting the allocation of a caseworker prior to the start of a Stage 2 review. A table giving information on Stage 2 allocations will be placed in the Library.

Criminal Records

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the introduction of *(a)* basic criminal records disclosure and *(b)* the Protection of Vulnerable Adults List. [126821]

Paul Goggins: The priority for the Criminal Records Bureau is to ensure that the demand for higher level disclosures is fully met; to this end we have announced proposals for the introduction of checks on care workers starting in October. The Basic Disclosure service will not be introduced until this objective has been achieved. Moreover, we are considering the Independent Review Team's proposal that applications for Basic Disclosures should be routed through Register Bodies. In the event that the Government decides to proceed, it would be necessary to amend Part 5 of the Police Act 1997 before the change could be implemented.

We are working with the Department of Health to implement the Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA) list as soon as practicable.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the care home sector on deferring increases in fees for Criminal Records Bureau checks. [124883]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* To date we have received some 100 written representations from the care home sector with regard to the increase in Criminal Records Bureau fees. These primarily expressed concern about the scale and timing of the increase. The Criminal Records Bureau has received a further 27 written representations on this matter from the care home sector.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Criminal Records Checks have been outstanding for *(a)* three months, *(b)* six months and *(c)* more than 12 months. [124900]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* The number of outstanding valid Disclosure applications over three, six and 12 months old are as follows:

	Number
3–6 months	1,671
6–12 months	1,843
Over 12 months	120
Total	3,634

The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) has undertaken several initiatives recently to reduce the number of aged applications in the system. These have included contacting applicants and the Registered Bodies who submitted the applications to encourage them to provide any outstanding information and seeking closer co-operation with the police forces to prioritise applications in their systems.

The Bureau continues to improve its output and is already achieving its Business Plan target that the number of applications over six weeks old, will be reduced to no more than 5 per cent. of work in progress by September 2003. The Bureau is now achieving its published service standards of issuing 90 per cent. of Standard Disclosures within two weeks and 90 per cent. of Enhanced Disclosures within four weeks.

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received from the voluntary and community sector about the increase in fees for Criminal Records Bureau checks; and if he will make a statement. [125121]

Paul Goggins: To date we have received a small number of representations from the voluntary and community sector, including from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, with regard to the increase in Criminal Records Bureau fees. These primarily expressed concern about the scale of the increase and the absence of consultation prior to the introduction of the new fees. Checks on volunteers continue to be free, saving the voluntary sector an estimated £10 million in 2003–04.

Curfew Orders

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders sentenced to a curfew order or a community sentence with a curfew condition were unlawfully at large on the latest date for which figures are available, broken down by *(a)* category of offence, *(b)* contract region and *(c)* police force area; and what penalties have been imposed on each contractor as a result. [124917]

Paul Goggins: At 30 June 2003, 147 offenders sentenced to a curfew order or a community sentence with a curfew condition were unlawfully at large. Comprehensive information for the category of offence is not centrally available. The figures for each contract region are Southern (58), Midlands and Wales (25), London and Eastern (29) and Northern (35). The figures broken down by police force area are Avon and Somerset (32), Devon and Cornwall (8), Dorset (1), Hampshire (7), Sussex (7), Thames Valley (2), Wiltshire (1), Derbyshire (1), Dyfed-Powys (1), Leicestershire (4), North Wales (1), Northamptonshire (1), Nottinghamshire (3), South Wales (4), Staffordshire (1), West Midlands (9), Cambridgeshire (1), Essex (1), Herefordshire (5), Metropolitan (12), Norfolk (9), Suffolk (1), Doncaster (1), Durham (1), Lancashire (1), Liverpool (2), Manchester (13), Newcastle (6), Sheffield (3) and Wakefield (8). The contractors are not subject to penalties in these cases.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many extra prisoners he expects to be released as a result of the changes to the Home Detention Curfew scheme due to come into effect on 14 July 2003. [124967]

Paul Goggins: Three changes to the Home Detention Curfew (HDC) scheme will come into force on 14 July 2003. Taken together, these measures are not expected to increase the number of prisoners released under the scheme. However, those released will be released for a longer period—so adding to the number on HDC at any one time.

Dharmesh and Rashik Jamiet

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the case of Dharmesh (date of birth 27 February 1973) and Rashik (8 December 1977) Jamiet was received in the Appeal Processing Centre at the Home Office. [125523]

Beverley Hughes: The appeal papers for Mr. Dharmesh Jamiet and Mr. Rashik Jamiet were received in the Appeals Processing Centre (APC) of the Home Office on 7 January 2003.

Domestic Violence (Policemen)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many policemen found to have committed acts of domestic violence have been *(a)* suspended and *(b)* dismissed in England and Wales in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [125420]

Ms Blears: Information on domestic violence committed by policemen is not held centrally.

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders have been subjected to a drug treatment and testing order in each year since it was introduced; and how many of these have re-offended during the period of the drug treatment and testing order. [124864]

Paul Goggins: The number of drug treatment and testing orders (DTTOs) commenced in each year since the order was rolled-out to courts in England and Wales in October 2000 is as follows:

	Number
2000–01 (six months)	1,256
2001–02	4,854
2002–03	6,140

It is too soon for validated information about re-offending since roll-out. It is currently impossible to differentiate between offences committed prior to the commencement of the order and those committed after the order was made.

Enforcement Uplift Project

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many additional cases he estimates will be brought to courts in London as a result of the enforcement uplift project; and how many of these cases he estimates will be dismissed. [124968]

Paul Goggins: London Probation Area's uplift project is intended to bring their performance on enforcement in line with National Standards so as to ensure that offenders who fail to comply with the requirements of an order or licence are returned to court quickly.

Latest sample monitoring (for the period April to May 2003) shows that London are meeting the enforcement standard in 53 per cent. of relevant cases compared with the national target of 90 per cent. The uplift therefore requires an improvement of 37 percentage points, or an increase of 59 per cent. in the number of cases currently enforced in order to meet the target. This would equate to approximately 250 additional cases per month.

Rigorous enforcement leads to greater compliance, so the number of cases brought to court would reduce as levels of compliance increased.

Based on statistics for London courts for the year 2001 (the latest for which data are available), we would estimate that few if any cases brought before the courts for breach of a community sentence would be dismissed. The 2001 figures for London and for England and Wales are given in the table.

Number of defendants proceeded against for breach of community sentence and the number dismissed, for London Courts and England and Wales 2001[1]

	Community Rehabilitation Order	*Supervision Order*	*Community Punishment Order*	*Attendance Centre Order*	*Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Order*	*Curfew Order*	*Reparation Order*	*Action Plan Order*	*Drug Treatment and Testing Order*
England and Wales 2001									
Proceeded against	13,487	1,148	16,268	981	7,027	770	176	420	736
Dismissed	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Withdrawn	7	—	3	3	1	4	7	5	3
London Courts 2001									
Proceeded against	1,167	254	1,306	81	650	81	28	77	64
Dismissed	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Withdrawn	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

Source:

Offending and Criminal Justice Group.

IOS: 402–03.

Entitlement Cards

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations have been received on entitlement cards from *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations. [126449]

Beverley Hughes: The consultation period on entitlement cards and identity fraud formally ended on 31 January 2003. We received a total of 4,942 individual responses from companies/organisations and from individual members of the public, broken down as follows:

Individuals: 4,766

Organisations: 176

A further 5,031 responses from individual members of the public were sent in via the STAND website.

These responses have been counted in the same way as other inspired samples or surveys of opinion which by their nature cannot be representative of the population as a whole.

We have been carefully analysing all the responses received and are in the process of preparing a detailed summary of the responses which will be publishing.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the Department's policies have been screened for their environmental impact since June 2001; how many environmental appraisals have been conducted, and on what policy issues; and what information has been published about these screenings and appraisals. [124711]

Fiona Mactaggart: No central records are kept of the number of policies for which environmental screenings are undertaken. However, advice on the need to screen policies for environmental impacts is contained on the Department's policy makers checklist and the ministerial website on the Department's Intranet site states that policy submissions should contain a section on environmental considerations.

No environmental appraisals have been conducted on policy issues, although assessments of environmental impacts are undertaken on building developments as required by planning authorities.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the EU directives implemented by the Department since 8 June 2001. [126602]

Ms Blears: The Home Office has implemented three European Community Directives during the period specified:

Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin was implemented in England, Wales and Scotland by SI 2003 1626.

Council Directive 2001/51/EC of 28 June 2001 supplementing the provision of Article 26 of the Convention implementing the Schengen Agreement was implemented on the basis of existing legislation. Notification to this effect was sent to the Commission on 16 January 2003.

European Community Directive 2000–8 on the manufacture and placing on the market of certain substances used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances was implemented by SI 2001 No. 3683.

European Constitution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with *(a)* colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and *(b)* counterparts in the European Union about the legislative competencies covered by the draft European Constitution. [124787]

Caroline Flint: As part of the normal Whitehall process, I and my officials have had regular correspondence with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss all aspects of the Convention, including legislative competences. We have also had regular contact with Member and Accession States to discuss issues arising in the Convention. In line with exemptions 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not the normal practice of Governments to disclose details about internal discussions, or information whose disclosure would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs.

European Stress Awareness Day

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total cost was of providing European Stress Awareness Day activities for police forces; and how many police forces used Home Office funding for such activities. [125657]

Ms Blears: European Health and Safety Week in October 2002 was focused on psycho-social issues, including stress. The Health and Safety Executive, the sponsoring body, has not retained a complete record of organisations, including police forces, who participated in events supporting the Week's aims. However among forces in England and Wales that received regional or national awards for their activities, the total cost to those forces was estimated to be approximately £10,500. This figure does not include the personnel hours spent organising events, and the abstraction time of those police staff who participated.

Some police forces report using a portion of the funds allocated to them in support of the Strategy for a Healthy Police. They will be required during 2003–04 to evaluate their use of these funds, following guidance issued by the Home Office, to determine whether their initiatives have had a significant impact on sickness absence rates.

Extradition

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of removing

the requirement for a prima facie case for extradition requests from the United States of America, with regard to the new Extradition Treaty with the United States of America. [125032]

Caroline Flint: The new UK-USA bilateral Extradition Treaty will remove the requirement for the United States to provide prima facie evidence to accompany its extradition requests.

The United Kingdom already disapplies the prima facie requirement for some 40 other countries—the signatories to the European Convention on Extradition—and we see no reason why this facility should not be available to an established democracy such as the USA.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for improving extradition procedures; and what his timetable is for changes. [126817]

Caroline Flint: The Extradition Bill, which will reform the United Kingdom's extradition law, is currently in Committee Stage in Another Place. We hope it will receive Royal Assent later this year.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the new extradition treaty signed with the US on 31 March 2003. [126908]

Caroline Flint: As at 17 July 2003, the Home Office had received 38 letters and e-mails either directly from members of the public or via Members of Parliament. There have also been a number of parliamentary questions on this topic in this House and Another Place.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been extradited from the United Kingdom to the United States in each of the last five years. [124970]

Caroline Flint: The information requested is as follows:

	Number of persons surrendered by UK to USA
1998	7
1999	7
2000	9
2001	8
2002	12

Firearms

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many firearms and how much ammunition have been surrendered since January *(a)* in the West Midlands and *(b)* in England and Wales. [126439]

Caroline Flint: The information requested is not collected centrally. However, information on the number of guns handed in to the police during the amnesty in April is contained in the table.

Handed in to the police 31 March 2003 to 30 April 2003

	Prohibited firearms[1]	*Non-prohibited guns*[2]	*Total number of guns*	*Total no of rounds of ammunition*
West Midlands	179	1,086	1,265	53,190
England and Wales	6,249	34,258	40,507	895,274

[1] In the West Midlands this included one fully automatic weapon, 168 handguns, six prohibited rifles, one prohibited shotgun and three other prohibited firearms.
[2] In the West Midlands this included 38 non-prohibited rifles, 412 imitations, 475 air guns, 145 shot guns, and 16 other non-prohibited weapons.

I placed full details of the weapons handed in to the police during the recent amnesty in the Library on 15 July 2003.

Flight Attendants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 3 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 667W, on flight attendants, for what reasons flight attendants are not required to obtain a Criminal Records Bureau check; and what plans his Department has to require flight attendants to have such checks. [124027]

Paul Goggins: The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) issues Standard Disclosures in respect of positions falling within the Exceptions Order to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and in the case of Enhanced Disclosures those positions also falling within s115 Police Act 1997. Flight attendants are not explicitly provided for in either of these two pieces of legislation. Nevertheless, depending upon the exact duties of individual flight attendants, they may on a case by case basis fall within the definition of a 'regulated position'. However, due to the nature of the organisations for which they work, there is no statutory obligation for them to be checked against the lists maintained by the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills of those individuals considered unsuitable to work with children. Therefore, there is no requirement in legislative terms for flight attendants to obtain a CRB Standard or Enhanced Disclosure.

The CRB is not responsible for imposing and enforcing requirements for obtaining CRB Disclosures. This responsibility lies with the Government Department or licensing/regulatory authority that regulates or has a supervisory role over the industry sector concerned.

Home Detention Curfew

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the prisoners under home detention curfew *(a)* broke their curfew and *(b)* re-offended while under curfew for each month (i) in 2002 and (ii) to date in 2003; and if he will make a statement. [117686]

Paul Goggins: The number of prisoners subject to the home detention curfew scheme has increased significantly over the past year as a result of the decision to increase from 60 to 90 days the period of time prisoners serving a sentence of 12 months and over spend on the scheme and by encouraging governors to place more prisoners on the scheme where it is safe to do

so. The following table shows the average number of prisoners on the scheme every month from January 2002 to April 2003.

The table also shows the number of prisoners subject to the home detention curfew scheme, who:

(i) have breached the conditions of their curfew, pursuant to section 38A(1)(a) of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, as reported to the Prison Service by the electronic monitoring contractors. (This refers to prisoners who have been absent from their curfew address, or have intentionally damaged their electronic personal identification device); or

(ii) are reported to the Prison Service as having been cautioned, convicted or who are awaiting prosecution for an offence committed while they were subject to the home detention curfew scheme.

The Home Detention Curfew scheme is designed to ensure a better transition for short-term offenders between custody and the community. The safety of the public is paramount at all times.

Month	*Number of offenders on the HDC scheme (at the end of the last full week of each month)*	*Breaches of Curfew reported to the Prison Service*	*Offenders reported as having committed a further offence while subject to HDC*
2002			
January	1,672	54	7
February	1,707	47	11
March	1,965	58	14
April	2,103	64	12
May	2,300	88	26
June	2,327	123	18
July	2,292	127	26
August	2,410	127	28
September	2,384	119	20
October	2,431	125	24
November	2,584	125	26
December	3,097	156	21
2003			
January	3,055	155	37
February	3,019	142	32
March	3,128	163	35
April	3,135	179	35

Identity Card Scheme

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact on police man hours of the implementation of the proposed identity card scheme. [126739]

Beverley Hughes: The consultation paper on Entitlement Cards and Identity Fraud discussed some potential efficiency savings for the police in being able to identify people quicker. An example would be recording details of people questioned and eliminated from inquiries if they were carrying a card at the time and gave their consent for it to checked. The Government have ruled out a card scheme where it would be compulsory to carry a card and therefore there would be circumstances where efficiencies such as these could not be realised.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Scottish Executive to discuss the introduction of identity cards. [126571]

Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has maintained close contact with the First Minister dating from before the publication of the consultation paper on Entitlement Cards and Identity Fraud. However, no formal meetings have been held.

Home Office officials met officials in the Scottish Executive to discuss issues of particular relevance to the devolved Administration, prior to the publication of the consultation paper, and this contact has continued.

Industrial Illness

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with other European states involved in the pan-European PMR TETRA network roll-out on *(a)* standardising guidelines for public safety, *(b)* sharing reports relating to reported incidents of industrial illness through use of the system and *(c)* contractual changes in the roll-out programme; and if he will make a statement. [124957]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 July 2003]:* No TETRA-specific discussions have been held with other European states on any of these topics.

A number of European radio networks such as Airwave, the new radio system for the Police Service in Great Britain, are based on the TETRA technology. However, these networks are not interconnected and there is no pan-European TETRA network.

Public safety guidelines on radio systems are not technology-specific. The EC recommends the use of International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) health and safety guidelines (Council Recommendation of 12 July 1999 on the limitation of exposure of the general public to electromagnetic fields, 0 Hz to 300 GHz). Network operators in the UK are required to comply with these guidelines. Independent checks of Airwave equipment have confirmed that it is fully compliant with ICNIRP guidelines.

TETRA network operators and equipment manufacturers would need to implement any changes in health and safety regulations. Any contractual impact would depend on the nature of those changes.

Inquests (Cleveland)

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many days in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* up to the last day of June 2003 (i) the Coroner, (ii) the Deputy Coroner and (iii) the Assistant Deputy Coroner for Cleveland sat on inquests; and what the regional average numbers of sitting days are for sitting coroners. [126355]

Paul Goggins: The information requested in respect of the Teesside Coroner's District is as set out in the table. I understand that additional sitting days were scheduled but not used where the inquests were not then ready to proceed. Dates for the opening of inquests only are excluded.

Data on the national and regional numbers of coroners' sitting days are not held centrally.

Teesside coroner's district: sitting days

	2001	2002	2003 (to end June)
Coroner	83	75	40
Deputy Coroner	27	27	20
Assistant Deputy Coroner	0	18	10

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time has been between deaths and inquests in Cleveland; what assessment he has made of the reasons for delays; and what the average time was in the other coroners' areas in the north-east in the last 12 months. [126356]

Paul Goggins: Where inquests have been completed, the average time taken between the report of a death and the inquest in the Teesside coroner's district in 2002 was about 34 weeks. Calculated on the same basis, the average time in other north-east coroners' districts is about 21 weeks, and the average for England and Wales is about 19 weeks.

The Teesside coroner has attributed delays in a temporary loss of available coroner officer support during the year. Some delays are also said to be due to difficulty in obtaining timely post mortem examination reports because of a local shortage of pathologists. The coroner has recently secured some additional pathologist resources.

Junior Attendance Centres

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many junior attendance centres have not been inspected within the last three years; [126574]

(2) what plans he has to introduce a national inspectorate of junior attendance centres. [126675]

Paul Goggins: All Junior Attendance Centres have been inspected in the last three years and the programme is up to date. We have an Inspectorate of five people, and there are no current plans to change this.

Juvenile Detentions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juvenile detentions have been made in *(a)* the West Midlands and *(b)* Coventry over each of the past five years. [125356]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 15 July 2003]:* The information requested is contained in the table.

Statistics for 2002 will be available in the autumn.

Number of persons aged 10–17 years sentenced to immediate custody[1] for all offences in the West Midlands, 1997 to 2001

	West Midlands police force area	Of which: Coventry
1997	636	68
1998	646	82
1999	701	70
2000	710	86
2001	811	105

[1] Secure training order, detention and training order, young offender institution, detention under Sec 53 C&YPA 1933 and detention under sees 90–92 PCCA(S)A 2000.

Kirkham and Wealston Prisons

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to reduce the number of prisoners absconding from Kirkham and Wealston Prisons. [125561]

Paul Goggins: Significant efforts are being made across the prisons estate to reduce the number of absconds. This includes improvements to prisons' physical conditions, and the provision of better regimes with more purposeful activity.

At Kirkham prison an Abscond Prevention Group is examining and introducing a range of measures including: improved fence patrols; the feasibility of infra-red cameras; improvements to the establishment's intelligence systems with additional staff being used in the sifting and collation of intelligence data; and improved communications with the police.

At Wealstun, lighting and cameras covering the establishment's boundaries have been increased and staff are also working to ensure that reception procedures are strengthened, with induction interviews taking place prior to the prisoner's first night at the prison, in order to help prisoners settle in as quickly as is possible. Efforts are also being made to replace any old or sub-standard accommodation.

London Probation Service

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the London Probation Service in making contact with victims in relation to their guidelines; and what recent discussions he has had with the service; [125369]

(2) in what proportion of cases the *(a)* Victim Liaison Service and *(b)* London Probation Service made contact with the victims and families of victims on time in 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [125370]

Paul Goggins: National figures show that in the period April 2002-March 2003, 82 per cent. of victims of offenders who had committed serious sexual or violent offences were contacted within the eight week target, compared with 63 per cent. for the previous year. In London, 46 per cent. of victims were contacted within the eight week target compared with 22 per cent. the previous year; London Probation Area's performance for the first quarter of this year has shown a significant improvement, rising to 72 per cent. for January to March 2003. Part of the reason for this improvement is the resolution of difficulties in the London Probation Area receiving victim contact information promptly.

The national target is for 85 per cent. of cases to be dealt with within the eight week deadline. I myself have not held any recent discussions with London Probation Area.

Mario Clarke

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in the identification of Mario Clarke's killer. [126366]

Caroline Flint: The Metropolitan police have said that their investigation of this murder is active and ongoing. Several lines of inquiry are being followed. At present the identity of Mario Clarke's killer is still unknown.

Marsham Street Building

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the inquiry into the timber used on the construction site at 2 Marsham Street has been completed; and if he will place a copy of the report from that inquiry in the Library. [126070]

Fiona Mactaggart: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) on 9 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 830W. Outstanding information on the purchase of plywood from Indonesia and Brazil remains to be provided by the developer. When the investigation into the Greenpeace allegations was announced it was stated that any lessons learnt would be brought to the attention of the Sub-Committee of Green Ministers. I have asked for the issues raised to be placed on the agenda at the next possible occasion.

Metropolitan Police Recruitment

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on police recruitment into the Metropolitan police. [125504]

Ms Blears: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that since 1 April 2003 the Metropolitan police have recruited 765 officers against a recruitment target for the year of 3,440. Of the 765 recruited so far 21.5 per cent. were female and 11.6 per cent. were from visible Ethnic Minorities. The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) currently has approximately 1,250 vacancies.

About 5,500 applications are under consideration. Successful candidates from these applications will meet the MPS requirement for recruits to March 2004.

Miscarriages of Justice

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the support available for families of victims of miscarriages of justice. [124512]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 8 July 2003]:* Support from the Home Office is equally available to all prisoners' families and is not affected by any allegation that an individual is a victim of a miscarriage of justice.

The Home Office no longer has responsibility for reviewing the convictions of prisoners. The Home Secretary's powers to consider alleged miscarriages of justice came to an end on 31 March 1997. These were replaced by new powers vested in an independent body, the Criminal Cases Review Commission, which has a main responsibility under the Criminal Appeal Act 1995 to review suspected miscarriages of justice, and to refer a conviction, verdict, finding or sentence to the appropriate court of appeal when the Commission considers that there is a real possibility that it would not be upheld. Any family member can apply to the Commission on behalf of someone believed to be a victim of a miscarriage of justice. (The Commission will not generally review a case until the normal appeal process is exhausted). We would carefully explain this to family members writing to the Home Office and redirect them to the Commission.

The Home Office is funding the Royal Courts of Justice Citizens Advice Bureau's Miscarriages of Justice Project which supports prisoners, who have had their convictions referred back to the Court of Appeal by the Commission, in the period leading up to their release and for up to six months after. This service would extend to providing advice on Family/Relationship issues.

An individual whose conviction is overturned may be eligible for statutory or ex gratia compensation for a wrongful conviction and can apply to the Home Office. Both schemes are concerned only with the suffering of the victim of the wrongful conviction, so neither makes provision for compensation for the suffering of any relative or other third party. However, in deciding the amount of any compensation award made to an individual, the assessor will take into account the costs of prison visits and of any family campaign to get the conviction quashed.

Mobile Communications

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of that part of the Stewart Report, referring to TETRA masts, which expressed concern of possible health effects from signal modulations at frequencies close to 16Hz. [126705]

Caroline Flint: The Stewart Report did not refer to Terrestrial Trunked Radio (TETRA) masts. It focused on mobile phones and only listed TETRA as one of the existing standards for mobile communications.

There are no health concerns specific to TETRA masts. Operators must ensure that emissions from radio masts are below international health and safety guidelines in areas accessible to the public. Independent checks have confirmed that this is indeed the case for TETRA masts used for the new police radio communications system.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the National Radiological Protection Board Report of July 2001 and on the actions he is taking on its health recommendation. [126706]

Caroline Flint: Following the concerns raised in the Stewart report on "Mobile phones and health" about amplitude-modulated signals, we took expert advice from the National Radiological Protection Board's Independent Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation (AGNIR). Their report on "Possible health effects from Terrestrial Trunked Radio (TETRA)" concludes that

> "current evidence suggests that it is unlikely that the special features from TETRA mobile terminals and repeaters pose a hazard to health".

The AGNIR report also confirms that

> "it is notable that the signals from TETRA base stations are not pulsed".

The AGNIR experts made recommendations for long-term research to address remaining areas of uncertainty. We have taken this forward with an

extensive research programme. Results to date show that TETRA technology has no effect on calcium exchanges in cells—the main concern of the Stewart report. They also confirm that all Airwave equipment fully complies with international health and safety guidelines. We have recently announced a £5 million health monitoring study of police Airwave users. Regularly updated information on the Home Office research programme is available at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs/tetra.html.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how mobile communications will be funded after the Government's initial commitment to the TETRA programme. [126707]

Caroline Flint: Airwave, the new radio communications system for the police service, is based on Terrestrial Trunked Radio (TETRA) technology. The Airwave framework arrangement under the Private Finance Initiative is in place until 2019. The Government initially committed £550 million of central funding to the Airwave programme, which is also funded locally by police authorities. Options for funding Airwave in the longer term are under review.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the findings of the audit of TETRA base stations carried out by the Radiocommunications Agency. [126708]

Caroline Flint: Airwave, the new radio communications system for the police service, is based on Terrestrial Trunked Radio (TETRA) technology. On the recommendation of independent experts, we asked the Radio-communications Agency to carry out audits of Airwave base stations, as they already do for mobile phones masts. 12 audits have now been completed. The results confirm that emission levels from Airwave base stations are hundreds of times less than international health and safety guidelines in areas accessible to the public. Results will shortly be available on the Radio-communications Agency website.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from chief constables and police authorities on the affordability of TETRA Communication. [126900]

Caroline Flint: We have not received any representations from Chief Constables and Police Authorities on the affordability of Airwave, the new radio communications system for the police service. £550 million have been made available from central funding for Airwave.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have reported ill effects from using the TETRA Communication system. [126901]

Caroline Flint: Fewer than 10 police officers have formally reported ill effects they attribute to the use of Airwave, the new radio communications system for the Police Service. No police officers have taken sick leave attributed to the use of Airwave.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research has been undertaken on the biological effects on animals close to TETRA masts. [126911]

Caroline Flint: We are unaware of any research on the possible biological effects of Terrestrial Trunked Radio (TETRA) masts on animals close to the masts. Neither the Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones (who produced the Stewart Report on "Mobile Phones and Health") nor the National Radiological Protection Boards' Independent Advisory Group on non-Ionising Radiation (who produced a follow-up report on "Possible Health Effects from TETRA") have suggested that such research should be undertaken.

Mugging/Robbery Victims

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 7 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 647W, on robbery/burglary victims, how many injuries were sustained in muggings and robberies in each year. [125796]

Ms Blears: Data on the number of injuries sustained in muggings and robberies in the specified years is not published. However, the British Crime Survey (BCS) is able to provide trend estimates of the number of incidents of mugging and robbery in England and Wales (Table A), additionally the BCS also collects information on the proportion of violent incidents involving injury (Table B). Violent incidents from the BCS can be classified into a violence typology comprising domestic, mugging, stranger and acquaintance incidents. Violent crime from the BCS can also be separated into robbery, wounding, common assault, and snatch theft. The information regarding injuries sustained for this latter breakdown is not published prior to 2001–02 BCS interviews. Mugging is a popular rather than a legal term, comprising robbery, attempted robbery and snatch theft from the person. The BCS does not cover incidents against those aged under 16, nor those not living in private households.

Table A: Trends in BCS incidents of robbery and mugging, 1998 BCS, 2000 BCS and 2001–02 BCS interviews

Thousand

	1997	*1999*	*2001–02 BCS interviews*
Robbery	339	413	362
Mugging	423	472	441

Table B: Injuries sustained in muggings (1998 BCS, 2000 BCS and 2001–02 BCS interviews) and robbery (2001–02 BCS interviews)

Percentage

	Mugging		*Robbery*	
	1998	*2000*	*2001–02*	*2001–02*
No physical injury	57	71	70	63
Minor bruise/black eye	24	14	15	18
Severe bruising	14	12	17	21
Scratches	7	10	6	7
Cuts	12	4	11	13
Broken bones	1	1	2	2

Notes:

1. Results for muggings should be treated with caution due to the small number of incidents.
2. More than one type of physical injury may have occurred.
3. More than one response was allowed.

Nadhmi Auchi

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 19 May 2003 to the Member for North Norfolk, *Official Report*, column 645W, if he will list those who made representations in this case, broken down by *(a)* hon. Members, *(b)* peers and *(c)* others. [117406]

Caroline Flint: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 14 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 391W.

Oakington Immigration Reception Centre

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recommendations have been made by the Immigration Security advisers concerning security at the Oakington Immigration Reception Centre. [116100]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 5 June 2003]:* The Immigration Service Operational Security advisers have recommended the perimeter security of the residential units be enhanced to ensure that detainees do not leave units without being observed.

They further recommended that staff patrol the perimeter of the establishment, with clear instructions of their role to prevent escapes from the establishment.

Both these recommendations have been accepted, and are in the process of being implemented.

Official Spelling

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that official *(a)* correspondence, *(b)* reports and *(c)* documentation from his office uses the English spelling of words where this differs from the US version. [118864]

Fiona Mactaggart: Great care is taken to ensure that all documentation produced by the Home Office, whether letters, reports, electronic communications or other material, is written clearly and correctly. However, the Department produces thousands of letters and publications a year and it is not practicable to ensure that the English spelling of words is used in every single item of correspondence.

The Cabinet Office has issued guidance for departments on the handling of ministerial and other correspondence which emphasises that appropriate arrangements should be in place to ensure that the quality of all replies is high. It has also issued guidance on Plain Written English.

Work is being undertaken in the Department to run Plain English workshops for staff which, will be reflected in future communications from the Department.

Operation Antler

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of Operation Antler. [125654]

Ms Blears: Under Operation Antler, Wiltshire constabulary have investigated the issues surrounding the Service Volunteer Programme at Porton Down in relation to experiments conducted into the use of chemical and biological agents during the period 1939 to 1989. The Crown Prosecution Service announced on 8 July 2003 that there should be no prosecution of any person for any criminal offences arising from evidence reviewed to date on allegations made about experiments carried out on human volunteers at Porton Down, Wiltshire from 1939 to 1989.

As inquiries continue in one further case it would be inappropriate for me to make a statement on the outcome of Operation Antler at this stage.

Overtime Payments

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent on staff overtime in *(a)* the police service, *(b)* the Prison Service and *(c)* the Probation Service in the last five years for which figures are available. [124973]

Ms Blears: Figures for the amount spent on overtime in the police service are currently only available centrally for 2001–02 with a total UK spend of £400,392,000. This was made up of £319,620,000 for England and Wales, £26,097,000 for Scotland and £54,675,000 for Northern Ireland. Details of overtime payments for other years have not been aggregated.

Figures for overtime paid in the prison service are only available for the year 2002–03 when £12,878,000 was spent.

The figures for overtime paid by the National Probation Service are unavailable centrally, as the information is held on an individual basis by each of the 42 Probation Areas. An exercise to establish a central record is under way. I have asked for these overtime figures to be obtained for collation by officials in the National Probation Directorate. I will write to the hon. Member once I have this information.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Pudsey, on 2 May 2003, ref 116897. [125788]

Ms Blears: I apologise for the delay in replying. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 15 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 278W.

Parole

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners have been denied parole in each of the last five years on the sole basis that they deny their guilt; if he will make it his policy to end this practice where risk of re-offending is deemed minimal; and if he will make a statement; [121626]

(2) how many prisoners have been offered a place on a sex offender's training programme and declined to participate in each of the past five years; and what effect this has on a prisoner's privileges. [121627]

Paul Goggins: Information on the number of prisoners applying for parole and who deny their guilt is not centrally recorded by the Prison Service and to

provide it would be at disproportionate cost. Since January 2003, however, the Parole Board has begun to collate this data and the results are likely to be published in its future annual reports.

There is no rule or policy which prevents a prisoner who denies his or her guilt from progressing through the system, or from being released on parole licence. Such prisoners may be granted parole if their risk is assessed as having been reduced to a level that is compatible with the protection of public safety.

Peace Watch

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost has been of the policing of the Peace Watch demonstration at Gate 10, RAF Fairford; what proportion of this cost was paid for from the Gloucestershire Constabulary budget; how many *(a)* demonstrators and *(b)* police were present on each day of the demonstration; and who authorised the notices warning of the authorisation of deadly force to be placed on fences at RAF Fairford. [124194]

Ms Blears: The Chief Constable of Gloucestershire Constabulary informs me that he is not able to identify separate costing for policing the Peace Watch demonstration at Gate 10. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has agreed to pay special grant towards the additional costs of policing operations at RAF Fairford.

I understand that for the duration of the Peace Camp there were between 20 and 30 demonstrators. As a general rule there was a unit of one sergeant and six constables in the vicinity of the Peace Camp. Under US service regulations it is normal procedure to place warning notices in particularly sensitive areas within military establishments. Thousands of these notices are used by US military forces around the world to delineate sensitive areas. The reference to the authorisation of deadly force, placed on internal fences only, did not intend to imply that any blanket pre-authorisation had been given.

Police

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were per 100,000 population in Dorset constabulary in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [126441]

Ms Blears: The information requested is set out in the table.

Dorset police

Year to 31 March	*Police officers per 100,000 population*
1992	195.2
1993	196.0
1994	194.3
1995	191.4
1996	186.1
1997	188.3
1998	192.1
1999	186.0
2000	188.9
2001	195.5
2002	197.8

Note:
Population figures are provided by the Office of National Statistics (ONS). Comparisons for number of police officers to 100,000 population can be found in Home Office Statistical Bulletins, Police Strength for England and Wales, covering each year 1998 to 2002.

By 31 December 2002 Dorset police had 1,402 officers, a record number. The latest figure for civilian staff was 741 at 31 March 2002.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reform police pensions in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [126414]

Ms Blears: As stated in the National Policing Plan, the Government are considering options for modernising police pensions to make them more flexible and affordable for future entrants.

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received regarding the availability of training places for police officers; and if he will make a statement. [125396]

Ms Blears: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for the next three years the planned *(a)* net increase in the police force for England and Wales, *(b)* numbers of community support officers for forces in England and Wales and *(c)* expenditure on policing in England and Wales. [126325]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 July 2003]:* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has set a target of 132,500 police officers in 2004. Police strength is already at record levels. The latest figures show that as at 31 December 2002 there were 132,268 police officers in England and Wales. The Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) provided the resources for forces to recruit 9,000 officers over and above their previous plans in the three years to March 2003. Funding for the continued employment of those officers has been provided in 2003–04. In addition, the CFF is providing funding to support the recruitment and training of a further 650 officers in 2003–04, funded at 75 per cent. of pay costs.

We are on course to achieve our target number of 2,500 Community Support Officers (CSOs) by the end of this financial year (2003–04) and are aiming to have 4,000 CSOs in place nationwide by the end of 2005–06.

The 2004–05 funding allocation is currently under consideration. The amounts in respect of years 2005–06 and 2006–07 will be dependent on the outcome of the SR 2004 Government Spending Review exercise.

Prisons

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional funding has been awarded to prisons to reduce the number of suicides in them since January. [124700]

Paul Goggins: The Prison Service's efforts to reduce the numbers of self-inflicted deaths in prisons are supported by a number of broader approaches for which money is allocated. These include addressing the effects of handling larger numbers and throughput of prisoners, the development of detoxification regimes,

and considerable Department of Health resources allocated over the next few years to extend mental health in-reach support arrangements for prisoners.

The Prison Service is in the final year of a three-year strategy to develop policies and practices to reduce prisoner suicide and manage self-harm in prisons. The programme includes a series of inter-related projects aimed mostly at improving relevant pre-custody practices; reception, first night and induction arrangements; inter-agency information exchange; prisoner care; detoxification; prisoner peer support; and strengthening investigations into deaths in custody. Investment of over £21 million for the three years from April 2001 focuses on physical improvements and trials at six sites (Birmingham, Eastwood Park, Feltham, Leeds, Wandsworth, Winchester) and on full-time suicide prevention coordinators in the prisons where the risks are highest.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding is being provided in 2003–04 for each of the prisons within the Greater London area for the provision of education services for inmates. [123969]

Paul Goggins: Prison establishments in the London area have been allocated the following amounts:

Establishment	*Amount (£)*
Belmarsh	689,713
Brixton	405,788
Feltham	1,372,856
Holloway	869,780
Latchmere House	38,888
Pentonville	493,358
Wandsworth	531,412
Wormwood Scrubs	812,115

These amounts are from the ring-fenced education budget managed by Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU) and are for the funding of teaching and induction hours, delivery of library services and for the cost of materials.

Additional funding may be allocated in year, either by OLSU, the establishment or from Emergency Accommodation funds, which are allocated by the Prison Service, in response to increases in the prison population.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers from Great Britain have been seconded to work in the prison service in Northern Ireland in each year since 2000. [124143]

Paul Goggins: The Prison Service of Northern Ireland have no record of any prison officer being seconded to them from the Prison Service of England and Wales since 2000.

Prison Officers being seconded from the Scottish Prison Service is a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the percentage change has been in the prison population in England and Wales in each year since 1997. [124144]

Paul Goggins: The percentage change in the prison population in England and Wales in each year since 1997 is given in the following table.

Date	*Population*	*Percentage change*
30 June 1997	61,467	—
30 June 1998	65,727	6.9
30 June 1999	64,529	-1.8
30 June 2000	65,194	1.0
30 June 2001	66,403	1.9
30 June 2002	71,218	7.3
30 April 2003	72,853	2.3

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have been transferred from prisons in Great Britain to prisons in Northern Ireland in each year since 1997. [124146]

Paul Goggins: The number of prisoners transferred from England and Wales to Northern Ireland is given in the table.

The transfer of prisoners from Scotland to Northern Ireland is a matter for the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

	Number of prisoners transferred
1997[1]	3
1998	22
1999	9
2000	16
2001	17
2002	10

[1] Since 1 October 1997 when the new transfer provisions of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 came into force.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many extra prison places became available in each year from 1992 to 2003; [125214]

(2) how many extra prison places were ordered to be constructed in each year from 1992 to 2003; [125215]

(3) how many *(a)* prison places and *(b)* prisons are (i) under construction and (ii) projected; where they are located; and when they will become available for use. [125217]

Paul Goggins: The number of prisons, prison places and their opening dates are shown in the following table (Table 1). Table 2 shows projected prison places.

Table 1: Schemes under Construction

Establishment	*Places*	*Opening Date*
Birmingham	[1]400	April 2004
Morton Hall	80	September 2002
Highpoint South	120	October 2003
Wealstun	180	March 2004
Wymott	180	March 2004
Blakenhurst	180	June 2004
Swinfen Hall	120	June 2004
Lindholme	180	June 2004
Ranby	180	June 2004
Littlehey	40	September 2003
Stafford	40	September 2003
Morton Hall (Intermittent Custody Centre)	40	September 2003
Kirkham (Intermittent Custody Centre)	40	September 2003

[1] Approximate

Two new prisons are to be built at Ashford (near Heathrow) and Peterborough, which together will provide 1,290 places by the end of 2004–05.

Table 2: Places funded and to be provided

Establishment[1]	*Places*	*Opening Date*
Cell reclaims	180	December 2003
Location	120	February 2005
Location	120	February 2005
Location	120	February 2005
Location	120	April 2005
Location	120	April 2005
Location	120	April 2005
Location	400	December 2005
Location	180	August 2004
Location	120	August 2004
Location	120	August 2004

[1] At this stage it is not possible to give the location of the places shown in the table.

The Prison Service receives funding to provide additional capacity: order dates for specific elements of the capacity package vary considerably and are not readily available. They could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Table 3 gives information on the number of additional places provided from 1995 onwards: this is the earliest date for which information is available. The data includes places both at new prisons and those provided at existing prisons by building Houseblocks, Ready to Use Units (RTUs) and Modular Temporary Units (MTU). It does not take into account any places taken out of use or prison places provided by subsequent overcrowding.

Table 3: Additional places provided from 1995 onwards

	Number of places
1995–96	1,165
1996–97	1,857
1997–98	4,635
1998–99	1,697
1999–2000	2,071
2000–01	800
2001–02	1,103
2002–03	1,902

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to which prisons residents of the South West Bedfordshire constituency have been sent by the courts in the last year. [125819]

Paul Goggins: In the last year people appearing in court in Bedfordshire have been sent to the following prisons:

Bedford, Brockhill, Bullingdon, Chelmsford, Eastwood Park, Elmley, Feltham, Glen Parva, Highpoint, Holloway, Huntercombe, Leicester, Lewes, Onley, Reading, Send, Stoke Heath, Styal, Woodhill and Wormwood Scrubs.

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers were employed in each of the last 10 years. [126809]

Paul Goggins: The information requested is contained in the table and includes prison officers, senior officers, and principal officers.

At 31 March	*Numbers of prison officers*
1994	23,756
1995	24,237
1996	24,398
1997	23,058
1998	23,444
1999	23,875
2000	24,090
2001	23,777
2002	23,052
2003	23,582

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce overcrowding in prisons; and if he will make a statement. [124599]

Paul Goggins: We are committing significant funding to modernising and increasing the capacity of the prison estate. Funding has been provided for 2,820 additional prison places to be built at existing prisons. Two new prisons will also be opened at Ashford and Peterborough. Together with building programmes in progress, such as 400 additional places at Birmingham, the total useable capacity of the Prison Service estate will increase to around 78,700 by 2006.

In addition, the Criminal Justice Bill outlines a range of new sentencing options, including: the introduction of two 'intermediate' sanctions —'Custody Minus' and 'Intermittent Custody' which will allow offenders to retain employment and family contact during the week while being held in custody at weekends. These are options for sentencers which avoid the unnecessary use of full-time custody.

We have also recently extended the successful Home Detention Curfew (HOC) scheme to four and a half months. HDC, by enabling prisoners to be released early but while still being subject to restrictions placed on their liberty, facilitates a smoother and more effective integration back into society.

The Government continue to keep under review the demand on prison places and the capacity of the Prison Service to accommodate those prisoners sent to it by the courts.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers joined and left the Prison Service in each year since 2000–01. [124962]

Paul Goggins: The information requested is contained in the following table and covers prison officers, senior officers and principal officers.

	Officers leaving	*Newly recruited officers*	*Existing staff re-grading to prison officer*
2000–01	961	514	184
2001–02	1,342	363	262
2002–03	1,344	1,368	728

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers have resigned from the Prison Service within *(a)* six months, *(b)* one year and *(c)* two years of starting their employment in each of the last five years. [124913]

Paul Goggins: The information relating to the last three years is contained in the table. Information concerning the length of service of staff who left prior to June 2000 is not available.

Dates	*Prison officers resigning within six months of recruitment*	*Prison officers resigning between six and 12 months of recruitment*	*Prison officers resigning between one and two years of recruitment*	*Total officers resigning*
July 2000 to June 2001	15	22	52	372
July 2001 to June 2002	24	15	42	443
July 2002 to June 2003	49	37	18	575

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average cost per annum of imprisoning one offender was in the last year for which figures are available, broken down by *(a)* cost of incarceration, *(b)* cost of policing and *(c)* cost of judicial system and sentencing; and if he will make a statement. [126927]

Paul Goggins: The average cost to the Prison Service per prisoner in 2002–03 was £36,268 per year.

The police spent on average £830 responding to each recorded crime in 2002–03, although this varies significantly by the type of incident. Based on Police detection rates the cost per detection is approximately £3,500, however this includes some police activity on unsolved cases.

The cost of processing an offender sentenced to custody through the Criminal Justice System is estimated at around £1,035 for 2000–01. This included costs of the courts, legal aid, the Crown Prosecution Service and some Probation Service costs.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the risk assessment procedures used to assess prisoners' suitability for transfer to *(a)* category D prisons and *(b)* Kirkham Open Prison. [125477]

Paul Goggins: The definition of a category D prison is one that holds "prisoners who can reasonably be trusted in open conditions". Sentenced prisoners may be assessed for category D conditions either on initial categorisation following sentencing or during their sentence following a review of their security category.

The initial categorisation procedures use an algorithm to indicate a provisional security category for each individual prisoner. The algorithm takes account of: current offence(s), sentence length, previous offending, previous escapes or absconds and previous breaches of non-custodial disposals. An assessment is then made of this provisional category to determine whether it is appropriate. In the case of prisoners indicated for category D, this may typically include issues such as: current drug use; previous breaches of bail; the nature and circumstances of what may appear a fairly minor offence or vulnerability to bullying or coercion.

Prisoners have their security category reviewed at regular intervals. Those serving 12 months to less than four years are reviewed at six monthly intervals; those serving a determinate sentence of four years or more are reviewed annually. Prisoners may be reviewed more frequently than is warranted by their circumstances. The recategoristaion process places primacy on consideration of risk. The prisoner must be able to demonstrate a significant reduction in risk (to the public and/or of escape/abscond) to warrant recategorisation to conditions of lower security. Where category D is indicated as appropriate in terms of risk, consideration is then given to other issues that might suggest that the prisoner is otherwise unsuitable for open conditions. These might be issues of control, health care requirements or the need to complete educational or offending behaviour programmes. A fundamental review of categorisation is currently under way. Among other things, the review will be looking at the procedures for placing prisoners in conditions of low security.

These procedures apply to all prisons in England and Wales. Kirkham accepts prisoners who have been categorised D either by the local prisons or the training prisons. The prison does not accept prisoners who are serving, or who have served, a sentence for sex offences. Other prisoners who may have special requirements or present particular problems are considered on an individual basis for return to the closed estate.

I am arranging for a copy of the risk assessment form for a move to a prison of a lower security category and the assessment criteria for Kirkham prison to be placed in the Library.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) of 24 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 736W, on prisons, how many of those prisoners reported as having been recaptured by 17 June were recaptured *(a)* within a week, *(b)* within a month and *(c)* within six months; how many returned voluntarily; at what point following absconding a warrant for arrest is normally issued; and if he will make a statement. [124993]

Paul Goggins: The information requested is not collated centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The names and details of prisoners who have absconded are reported to the police as soon as possible after they event. The local police make inquiries in an attempt to find the absconder and ensure that police forces across the country are informed that the prisoner has absconded and is unlawfully at large. It is not necessary for a court to issue an arrest warrant.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners *(a)* were given day release from prison and *(b)* absconded from day release in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [124600]

Paul Goggins: The following table shows *(a)* the total number of temporary release licences issued, *(b)* the numbers of prisoners released and *(c)* the total number of temporary release failures (which includes absconds, but which are not recorded separately) for each year since 1993. Prior to 1993 temporary release statistics were not published and no data for that period is available.

	Total number of licences issued	*Numbers of prisoners released*	*Temporary release failures*
1993	148,573	26,633	2,996
1994	164,521	25,183	2,182
1995	164,521	15,499	637
1996	181,660	13,256	448
1997	227,078	13,466	564
1998	255,886	13,131	484
1999	256,179	11,656	517
2000	256,837	10,559	318
2001	270,122	10,082	278

Prisoners may be released on temporary licence for a number of purposes including compassionate reasons, training, employment and voluntary work, to re-establish family ties and help prisoners make the transition from prison to life in the community. On most occasions the licences recorded are for one day. For resettlement activities, however, the licence may cover up to five days away from the prison.

Probation Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the National Probation Service will publish an annual report. [124963]

Paul Goggins: The National Probation Service for England and Wales (NPS) was established by the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 and came into existence on 1 April 2001. The NPS consists of 42 Local Probation Boards and a central administrative function provided by the National Probation Directorate (NPD).

Although the NPS does not produce a single service-wide annual report, each of the 42 probation boards is required under the Act to submit after the end of each financial year ending 31 March an annual report to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on the discharge of its functions, including how it has performed against its key targets, and its audited accounts.

The NPS publishes consolidated accounts of the local probation boards annually.

The NFS also regularly publishes results on key performance and National Standards information, showing local probation board comparisons. These performance reports along with information for practitioners, sentencers, offenders and the general public are posted on the NPS website at www.probation.homeoffice.gov.uk. The most recent performance report (Number 8) gives up to date performance figures for the conclusion of year 2002–03.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of offenders completed Probation Service accredited programmes in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [124964]

Paul Goggins: In 2001–02 the percentage of offenders completing Probation Service accredited programmes, as a proportion of starts, was 37 per cent. This figure reached 48 per cent. in 2002–03. These are the national figures and are subject to variation from area to area.

It should be noted that, due to the nature of accredited programmes, offenders who start a programme in a given year do not necessarily complete the programme in that year.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the number of staff employed by the National Probation Directorate. [124966]

Paul Goggins: The National Probation Service was started in 2001 and the National Probation Directorate is still developing as the Home Office Headquarters for the National Probation Service. There are plans to increase staffing levels by 70 by April 2005.

Proceeds of Crime Act

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total value of assets and illegal gains confiscated from criminals is since the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 came into effect. [126510]

Caroline Flint: The confiscation powers in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 are triggered by offences committed after the provisions were brought into force on 24 March 2003, so it will be a while before cases are dealt with by the Crown Court in numbers. To date, two confiscation orders with a value of £53,000 have been made against convicted offenders in England and Wales. The value of cash seizures made under the new provisions in the Act which came into effect on 30 December 2002, and which are not dependent upon a conviction, is £28.5 million. In addition, the Assets Recovery Agency has obtained freezing orders from the High Court in London and Belfast on five civil recovery cases with a total value of £5.9 million.

Psychics

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in the last five years the Metropolitan police have employed the services of a psychic in the course of a criminal investigation; and at what cost. [124985]

Ms Blears: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the information requested is not held centrally. If a Senior Investigating Officer forms a professional opinion that the engagement of such a service may further a particular inquiry or provide support from a family liaison perspective, he or she is at liberty to make appropriate arrangements.

Remand Prisoners

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have been on remand awaiting trial for *(a)* 24 to 30 months, *(b)* 30 to 36 months and *(c)* more than 36 months; of those, what the longest time spent on remand in prison awaiting trial is; and if he will make a statement. [124971]

Paul Goggins: I will write to the hon. Member.

Royal Security

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase security for members of the Royal family on public occasions. [125997]

Mr. Blunkett: As you will appreciate, it would not be appropriate for me to comment upon the detail of royal security on the grounds that to do so may compromise the safety of those for whom such measures have been implemented. However, I can assure you that royal security arrangements are under constant review.

Sexual Offences

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has conducted on the number of individuals convicted of sexual offences against children who were themselves abused as juveniles; and if he will publish the results. [124126]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 7 July 2003]:* The Home Office has not conducted any research on the number of individuals convicted of sexual offences against children who were themselves abused as juveniles.

The most recently available Home Office statistics show that in 2001 there were 2,410 convictions for sexual offences against children where the age of the victim was identified by the offence. No information about the background of these offenders is collected.

A review of the literature on sex offending against children (Grubin; 1998) commissioned by the Home Office summarises academic research on the association between being a victim and becoming an abuser. This is available at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/index.htm.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been prosecuted for having unlawful sexual intercourse with a minor in the last five years for which statistics are available. [124399]

Paul Goggins: The available information is contained in the table.

Statistics for 2002 will be published in the autumn.

Number of persons proceeded against at magistrates courts for certain sexual offences against persons under 16 England and Wales 1997- 2001[1]

Offence	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*[2]	*2001*
Buggery by a male of a male under 16	107	124	140	105	111
Buggery by a male with a female under 16	35	19	23	28	9
Rape of a female aged under 16	592	698	714	659	919
Rape of a male aged under 16	45	49	63	68	107
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 13	40	40	32	40	53
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	153	171	169	167	177
Incest with a girl under 13	14	17	12	18	14

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.
[2] Staffordshire Police Force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions between 31 March 2002 and 31 March 2003 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [126664]

Mr. Blunkett: Between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2003, Special Advisers have accompanied myself abroad on five occasions[1] at an average total cost of £3,831[2] for all involved in the trip. The countries visited were Luxembourg, France and Denmark.

In addition, one official visit was made by a Special Adviser to France in November 2002 at a total cost of £546.86.

All travel by Special Advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Civil Service Management Code.

[1] Special Advisers also accompanied the Home Secretary to the USA during the period end March 2002/early April 2003. Costs for this trip fall with the current financial year.

[2] The average cost of all trips involved is high as an RAF flight booked for one trip fell through at the last moment and attendance was only possible through a more expensive last minute charter.

Tagged Offenders

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of tagged offenders who committed offences outside their curfew in each of the last three years; and what estimate he has made of the incidence of offenders removing their tags in order to commit unmonitored offences. [124844]

Paul Goggins: The data required to answer this question is not centrally available.

Treason Felony Act

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to propose the repeal of section 3 of the Treason Felony Act 1848; and if he will make a statement. [126688]

Paul Goggins: We have no immediate plans to repeal section 3 of the Treason Felony Act 1848.

Unsafe Convictions

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* housing provision, *(b)* benefits, *(c)* support and *(d)* financial support prior to compensation being paid is available to those released from custodial sentences after the conviction was found to be unsafe; and if he will make a statement. [124513]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 8 July 2003]:* The Home Office funded advice service for individuals released on appeal against conviction was launched in January this year. It is being piloted by Citizens Advice at the Royal Courts of Justice. Citizens' Advice is not in a position to provide direct financial support but are an advisory link into other services. Citizens Advice will assist clients by advising on compensation processes, facilitating and supporting clients to access appropriate benefits and housing services. It will provide support for other aspects of reintegration into the community such as assisting the client to look for education, training and employment opportunities.

Written Ministerial Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many written ministerial statements have been made by the Department since 29 October 2002. [126622]

Fiona Mactaggart: Between 29 October 2002 and 17 July 2003 the Home Office made a total of 132 written ministerial statements.

Wheel Clamping Companies

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many wheel clamping companies have been registered by the Security Industry Authority since it was established. [124843]

Caroline Flint: The Security Industry Authority (SIA) will begin to compile a public register of licence holders as soon as personal licensing begins.

The SIA came into existence on 1 April 2003. It is expected that the SIA will pilot the first phase of licensing, of door supervisors, in spring 2004 in the Hampshire police area and thereafter rollout out the licensing of door supervisors across England and Wales from summer 2004. The timetable for the licensing of wheel clampers is currently under consideration. The SIA will also operate an approved company scheme.

In preparation for the rollout of licensing, the SIA maintains a record of those people who have supplied their details on a voluntary basis. Up to 10 July, a total of 790 individuals from the wheel clamping sector have registered with the Authority. The SIA will contact them in due course to supply them with the information that they need to apply for a licence when the time comes.

Women Prisoners

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* average daily number of women in prisons in England and *(b)* the total number of women received into prisons was in each of the last 12 months. [124990]

Paul Goggins: The number of women in prisons in England in each of the last 12 months is given in the table. The data represents month-end figures.

	Number of women in prisons
April 2002	4,370
May 2002	4,403
June 2002	4,394
July 2002	4,372
August 2002	4,362
September 2002	4,403
October 2002	4,427
November 2002	4,368
December 2002	4,077
January 2003	4,214
February 2003	4,349
March 2003	4,470

The number of first receptions of women into Prison Service establishments in each of the last 12 months is given in the table.

	Total
April 2002	1,128
May 2002	1,249
June 2002	963
July 2002	1,150
August 2002	1,065
September 2002	1,018
October 2002	1,057
November 2002	970
December 2002	781
January 2003	1,051
February 2003	1,052
March 2003	1,173

Young Offenders

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many girls aged 15 have been placed in a young offenders institution since 1 October 2002; in which institutions they were held; and for how long. [124849]

Paul Goggins: Six girls aged 15 have been placed in a young offenders institution since 1 October 2002. Five were placed at New Hall and one at Brockhill. The details are as follows:

(i) girl aged 15 and 2 months placed in New Hall on 21 November 2002, transferred to a local authority secure children's home on 22 November 2002;

(ii) girl aged 15 and 7 months placed in New Hall on 22 November 2002, transferred to a local authority secure children's home on 2 December 2002;

(iii) girl aged 15 and 10 months placed in New Hall from 25 October 2002 to 24 December 2002;

(iv) girl aged 15 and 10 months placed in Brockhill from 3 October 2002 to 31 December 2002

(v) girl aged 15 and 11 months placed in New Hall from 7 November 2002 to 5 February 2003.

(vi) girl aged 15 and 11 months placed in New Hall from 27 November 2002 to 26 January 2003.

There are currently no 15-year-old girls in Prison Service accommodation, and around 16, 16-year-olds. On 18 February the Youth Justice Board (YJB) announced its intention to remove all under 17-year-old girls from Prison Service accommodation during 2003.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children have been transferred from each secure training centre and local authority secure home to a young offenders institution to date in 2003. [124850]

Paul Goggins: The placement of offenders under 18 in secure accommodation is the responsibility of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales. The Youth Justice Board confirms that the following transfers from secure training centres and local authority secure children's homes to young offender institutions have been made in 2003:

Secure Training Centres

	Number
Hassocksfield	10
Medway	14
Rainsbrook	4

Local authority secure children's homes

	Number
Aldine House	1
Atkinson	2
Aycliffe	1
Dales House	1
Eastmoor	2
Leverton	1
Sutton Place	2

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juveniles in each of the young offenders institutions were injured by other inmates in each month in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003. [124851]

Paul Goggins: Male juveniles are located in five establishments dedicated solely to juveniles and in nine other establishments that also hold young offenders. Female juveniles are held in seven establishments that also hold young offenders and, in some cases, adult female prisoners.

The Prison Service's incident reporting system records data by establishment and the extraction of data relating purely to juveniles in respect of assaults occurring in the split function establishments cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

The following table provides information on the number of assaults resulting in injury by juveniles on juveniles, in respect of the five establishments that hold male juveniles only. The term 'juvenile' covers prisoners who are over 18 but are serving a Detention Training Order having been under 18 at the commencement of the Order.

Month/year	*Ashfield*	*Huntercombe*	*Warren Hill*	*Werrington*	*Wetherby*
January 2002	33	4	8	5	3
February 2002	20	4	6	3	2
March 2002	16	1	13	1	1
April 2002	20	3	4	10	2
May 2002	24	1	7	3	2
June 2002	15	4	6	5	0
July 2002	15	2	3	6	5
August 2002	12	2	3	6	2
September 2002	6	2	2	1	1
October 2002	8	2	9	5	5
November 2002	14	5	3	6	1
December 2002	19	4	2	13	1
January 2003	11	5	3	6	4
February 2003	17	4	4	9	5
March 2003	20	9	3	7	5
April 2003	10	8	2	4	13
May 2003	13	4	3	2	7
June 2003	8	3	0	4	12
Totals	281	67	81	96	71

The figures are as reported to Prison Service headquarters by establishments.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are in place for strip searching girls who are menstruating. [124852]

Paul Goggins: Strip searching of women prisoners is conducted in accordance with procedures outlined in the Security Manual. There is particular emphasis on ensuring that the dignity of the prisoner being strip searched is protected as far as is possible. To this end, male members of staff are not allowed in the general area where strip searching is undertaken. The prisoner is never totally naked and staff are required to be sensitive to the feelings of the prisoner.

Where women or girls are menstruating and are using sanitary protection in the form of pads, the prisoner removes the pad from her underwear herself and places it in a specially provided sanitary bin. The search is conducted swiftly and fresh pads are available to the prisoner once the search is completed.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juvenile offenders are detained in Coventry; and how many were detained in Coventry on 30 June in each of the last five years. [126047]

Paul Goggins: The number of juveniles detained at Stoke House, a Local Authority Secure Unit in Coventry, from 2000 to 2002 is given in the table. Information is not available for June 1999. Stoke House closed on 20 September 2002.

As at 30 June	*Number of juveniles detained at Stoke House*
2000	8
2001	11
2002	7

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what recent meetings have been held between his Department and the Department of Health to examine issues surrounding ADD/ADHD in Young Offenders Institutions; [123765]

(2) what steps his Department has taken to assess the implications of behavioural difficulties of attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder of young people in Young Offenders Institutions. [123767]

Paul Goggins: Mental health care issues, including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and attention deficit disorder (ADD) are regularly discussed by staff in both departments in order to carry out the commitments for mental health in the NHS Plan. The NHS Plan includes provision for prisoners and a total of £10 million is being invested in 2003–04 to improve mental health services for them. Mental Health needs assessments were carried in all prison establishments last autumn to better gauge that need. By 2004 some 94 prisons, including all male local prisons and the majority of women's local prisons and young offender institutions will have received funding for community mental health in-reach teams to provide more comprehensive services for prisoners with severe mental health problems.

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OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 409**

SESSION 2002–2003

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Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

Indexes on the Parliamentary website

Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

HEADINGS

Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
- *Organisations and subjects*—Organisation entries are preferred for material about the general performance, administration and staffing of an organisation (for example, United Kingdom Passports Agency, Standards). Subject entries are preferred for what organisations do as part of their duties (for example, Passports, Fees and charges).

Geographical coverage

- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is indexed under these headings.
- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
- *Foreign countries*—Most material relating to foreign countries is collected under the name of that country. Some additional material may be found under the names of—groups of countries, areas within countries, geographical features, place names associated with particular issues, politicians and heads of state, international bodies, and institutions and companies operating in those countries.
- *EC/EU material*—General material about the European Communities and European institutions as bodies is entered under 'European Communities' and 'EC institutions'. Organisational material about specific communities and institutions is entered under the name of the body, for example 'European Coal and Steel Community' or 'European Parliament'. Material about what the Communities and institutions are doing or propose to do is entered under various subject headings beginning 'EC' such as 'EC environmental policy'.

Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
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  - References ending in 'ws' indicate written statements.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting, is a written statement or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
  - *Chamber Debates* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Debates Westminster Hall Debates* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Written Statements* (consisting of ministerial statements issued in writing); and
  - *Questions* (which includes all written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division
- (HL)=Bill starting in House of Lords
- (SP)=Bill in Scottish Parliament.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

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